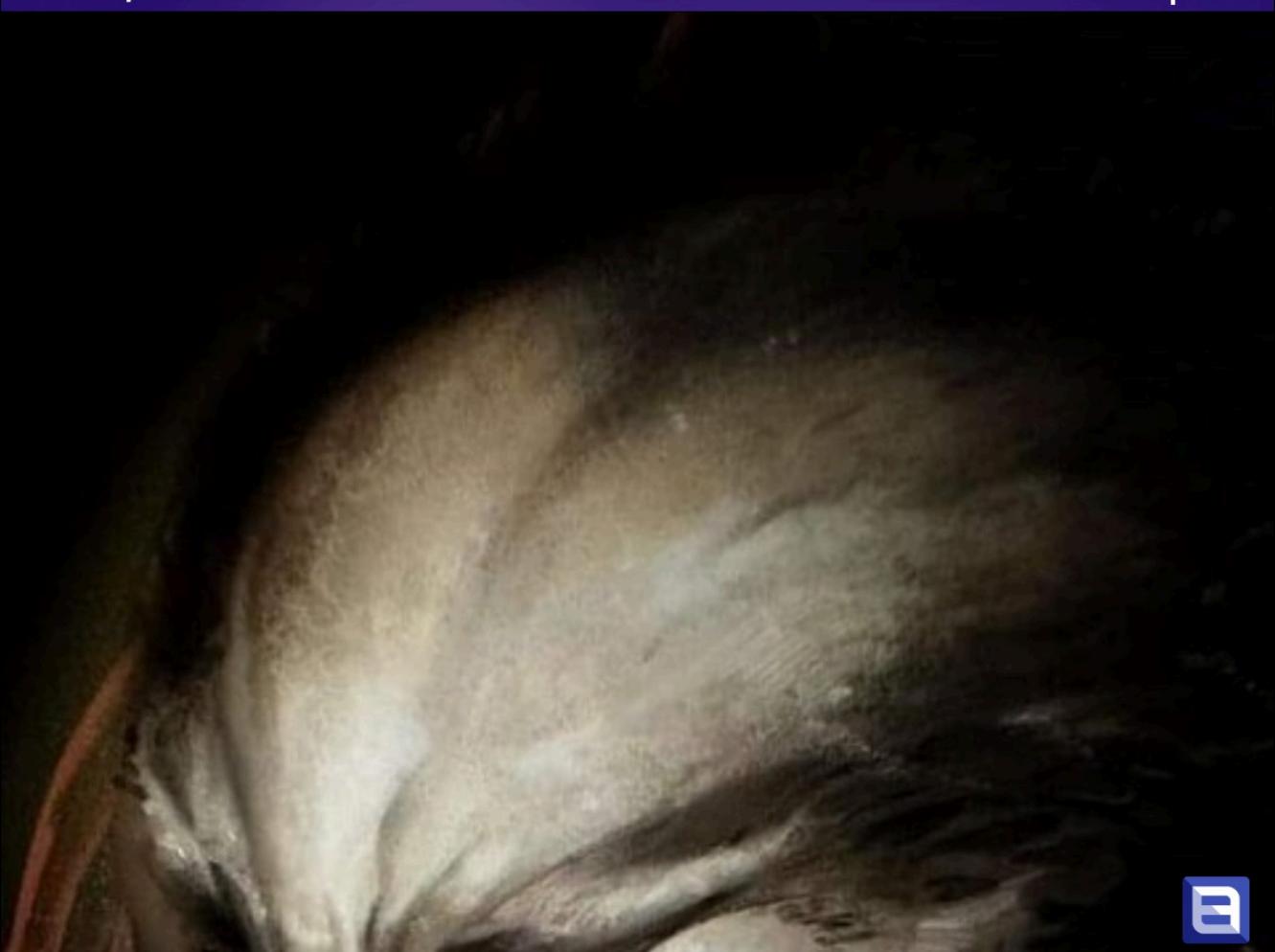


Challenge

Ariannak

Aliens/Predator

Complete



Challenge

AriannaK

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Summary

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Description:

A male yautja wishes to take a human for a mate, but she won't have anything to do with him...at first. (WARNING: Rated M for adult, sexual content and violence). Please R&R! COMPLETE

General Disclaimer

General disclaimer

This is a work of fiction intended for entertainment only. Any similarity to reality is a dreadful accident. I don't own Predator or Alien. No profit is gained from writing these stories.

Stories by this author may briefly mention or describe in detail mature topics and triggers such as:

- Crime, **use of weapons, fight sequences.**
- Drug and/or alcohol use.
- **Death, war, blood and gore.**
- **Violence** and abuse—both verbal and physical. **Non-consensual sex** and child molestation.
- Kidnapping, child abduction. **Child endangerment.**
- Slurs, racism, harassment, bullying, and foul language.
- Eating disorders, mental illness, self-harm and suicide. **Emotional trauma.**
- **Interspecies relationships and intercourse.**
- Sex that may be disturbing to some, such as: BDSM, anal, oral, multiple partners, etc.
- Parts of anatomy may be named in a scientific or sexual context.
- Cultural differences such as: religion, abortion, polygamy, arranged marriage, legal age, public sex and nudity, bestiality, inequality, slavery, euthanasia, death penalty, cannibalism, human sacrifice, etc.

Stories by this author are not intended to offend, encourage violence, or eroticize rape.
However, sensitive readers should not continue.

Chapter 1

Though the sun was high in the sky, heating and illuminating the earth, inside the forest was dimly lit and a calm breeze brought crisp, cool air. Sammi hid in the forest to escape the heat, as well as her master. He would have her do cardio until her lungs cracked, spar until her arms fell off, and train until she passed out. As a human hunting partner to a yautja, she was never good enough. Every day was about pushing her limits in speed, strength, and pain tolerance.

It was not the type of life she would have liked to have chosen for herself, but back on earth, it had been him or death. Naturally, she chose to stay alive no matter the cost. The cost however, seemed to include everything she had—her time and her freedom included. The small breaks she had away from him were spent in the forest within clan walls. It was the only time she had to herself to relax—though she was finding it hard to feel at ease this time.

Sammi brushed her hair behind her ear as she turned to scan the forest. She had been made into a skilled hunter just like the yautjas, and was sure she could hear someone following her. Her soft caramel-colored eyes settled on trees and brush but no aliens. Reluctantly, she turned away and continued into the forest, trying not to be paranoid. Everyone in the clan knew her master, knew her status, and would not think to mess with her—or so she thought.

She soon reached the towering stone wall that confined her. It dwarfed the trees, rising high above them, ensuring that no one could climb up and over. Sammi came to a stop, as this was the end of her freedom, and slumped in the grass with her back resting against its rough, gritty surface. She plucked up a long, thin piece of grass then and fed it through a crack in the stone. As always, the critter hiding inside woke up at the intrusion.

Pale white bristles reached out from the hole, preceded by the slender body of the worm. The bristles lined the side of the worm like legs, and its body was red with white spots. Sammi unclipped a small pouch from her clothes and opened it up to pull out a small blue fruit. The worm extended out of its hole further in anticipation. She peeled the fruit and turned to give a piece over to the critter.

The worm curled its body around it like a snake before taking bites out of the fruit. Other worms in the holes and crevices of the wall began to poke their heads out around her, wanting food too. When she had first discovered the worms, Sammi had been repulsed by them. However, she quickly found out that they were harmless and now she enjoyed feeding them. She distributed the pieces of fruit and then tried to rest her head against the wall, but a noise in the distance had her getting tense.

She wished she had brought a weapon with her, or was at least dressed for a fight. Instead of her usual armor, she wore a more casual garment. It was alien in style, being made up of one long strand of soft brown leather. It was wrapped around her tightly in areas, but dangled loosely in other places like from her arms. From far away it might look like she was wearing a matching long-sleeve shirt and shorts, but she felt like she was wrapped up like a mummy. Sammi was worried that it might just unravel if she decided to run, but she stood up anyway.

Tense and prepared to bolt, she searched the trees. Yautjas were excellent climbers, and sure enough she caught a blur of movement from one tree to the next. She could have ran away right then and there, but if a yautja was following her, there was a reason for it. Sammi wanted to know why she was being stalked. She could only hope that it was a curious visitor or a young clan member wanting to practice trailing prey.

Since she wasn't going to run off immediately, Sammi walked forward, distancing herself from the wall. She wanted plenty of room to maneuver lest she have to run or fight. Her eyes glued to the tree branches, she tried to spot the hiding yautja. There was only the slightest of sounds that indicated he was moving and she saw the swing of his dreads only once as he descended. The yautja dropped down from the tree right in front of her, landing with a loud thud.

His eyes were an eery, ice-white color rimmed in black while his skin was a blotched, dark grey and riddled with scars. He wore some sort of alligator-skin loincloth, a bracelet of woven twine and bone, as well as a necklace made out of vertebrae segments. To her, it was his hair that distinguished him the most though. His dreads were banded, with alternating light and dark brown segments, unique for his species. And among his dreads were bright silver and gold beads.

Sammi froze in place, instantly recognizing the yautja. He was the one who had recently stalked, cornered, and killed another yautjas trained hunting hound within the walls of the clan's communal living house. It was said that even though he provoked it, the hound had attacked first. Still, this yautja was a brutal hunter with a deep lust for blood. Death surrounded him, and spread in his midst.

He was not one to be messed with, and Sammi wished now that she had simply ran when she had the chance. Faced with this monster, she tried not to let her heart race right out of her chest and firmly stood her ground. Though he looked to have come unarmed, hand to hand combat with a yautja was not easily won.

Chapter 2

She watched his chest, his slow breathing, and tried to calm her own. She waited for him to charge at her, but he simply stood there staring. Sammi didn't like the way he was looking at her either, his creepy white eyes slowly making their way up and down her body. He was assessing her reaction, her strength. She unclenched her fists, but still stood tense in front of him.

His tusk-tipped mandibles twitched slightly before he spoke, introducing himself with a voice that sent chills up her spine, "I am Malo."

She had to swallow down the saliva pooling in her mouth first and then summoned the courage to say, "I know who you are. What do you want?"

She saw him lash his long, thin tongue across one tusk before he grunted, "Mate you."

The blood drained from her body and all she could manage to say was a breathless, "No."

She had been fucked by aliens twice before, once by her master, once with a young yautja who could not control his urges, and she was not looking forward to being pummeled again. His head cocked to the side slightly at her answer, causing his banded dreads to sway. Higher ranked yautja we're more civilized in many ways. In claiming mates, charm and status won. But for lower ranked yautja it was all about force. Though he was a brutal and unrelenting hunter, his status was not as high as ambassador, arbitrator, king, etc.

Taking a mate was a hunt, a challenge for those of middle and lower rank. Males had the right to challenge and try to subdue any females, but females were usually stronger. If a yautja female didn't take to a males advances, it was no big deal. Sammi was human though; she was property to these aliens and that had only one benefit-She could not be taken as a mate without her master's permission.

She was not protected by young rowdy yautjas with no control, but Malo was not young. And he knew the rules, so that meant he had followed her with the intention to break the laws and mate her anyway. She would not mate him once, nor be a permanent mate to such a brute if she could help it. Her mind raced, trying to decide the best course of action. He kept his eyes in her, and sort of swayed towards her when she moved as if he was prepared to catch her if she ran.

She wanted to buy time, "Why me?"

Using olfactory pits near his upper tusks, he lifted his head and slightly flared his mandibles as he smelled the air. His chest expanded as he drew in her scent, and then he huffed, "Like you."

Sammi began to sweat, getting increasingly nervous, but asked, "Why do you like me?"

Several long seconds passed without a word from him. Most yautjas were the silent type, but this guy could pass for a mute. He preferred others to assume whatever they wished about him and only spoke up when he absolutely had to. In his mind, he'd given her all the answer

she needed: He liked her. She had to run-but he moved before she did, slowly shuffling forward as an airy clicking noise cascaded from him.

Sammi's eyes narrowed and she harshly pointed her finger at his face, "Don't you dare click at me! I am not your prey!"

She was scolding and eight foot alien. Obviously, he did not back down. Muscle and claws lurched towards her then and she reacted. Sammi ran at him, scooped up one of his legs, and throttled a punch into his solar plexus. As she punched him, she brought up his leg as high as she could manage and that threw him off balance. He had underestimated her and had not anticipated any attack.

Malo's back hit the ground with a loud thunk. She tried not to stumble over his limbs and quickly darted away before he could recover. She knew she hadn't hurt him, but had only caught him off guard. He had expected her to run, not fight, but he would be back on his feet in half a second. Heart pounding and adrenaline fueling her forward, she rushed past the trees.

Sammi could hear him chasing after her, could hear his heavy footsteps and his deep breaths. He was gaining on her. She winced as twigs smacked across her cheek but she kept going. She pushed her body to run as fast as it could, ignoring her burning lungs. She didn't go in a straight line, trying to loose him, but in doing that she lost her sense of direction and the wall was suddenly in front of her.

She didn't turn, afraid that he was too close and would just snatch her up. Instead, Sammi ran and jumped at the wall, taking a few sideways steps with the momentum. She rebounded off the stone and headed right back the way she came, leaving Malo behind her. Sammi heard a clipped growl from him, but he turned around and continued to chase her. She needed a better tactic.

When she could feel the heat and musk permeating from his body so close behind her, Sammi folded her legs and dropped to the ground. Malo stumbled over her, so much muscle and mass unable to stop quickly. Sammi scrambled to her feet and zipped away. She only had a few seconds head start. She headed out of the woods, hoping it was enough to get her to safety.

She made it all the way back to the house, down the stretch of endless hallways, and to her room. At the door, her legs gave out from under her. Her weight fell against the cold metal and it took the last of her strength to shove it open as Malo turned the corner and spotted her. Sammi collapsed to the floor, chest heaving and blood rushing through her veins. She lifted her head, looking for her master, but the room was empty.

She heard Malo reach the entryway, and the door was still open. Fearing he would barge into the room, she quickly spun around to face him, ready to fight despite the fact that her legs felt like rubber. His chest was heaving with strained breaths, and Sammi was proud at least that she had worn him out. She would have liked just to rest on the floor for a while longer, but pushed herself to stand and face him. In a fight against him, she knew deep down she would lose-but he didn't budge.

Instead, a rumbling purr spilled out from him. Her anger suddenly flared. She did not want him purring at her like a weak, emotional female. Sammi's hand grasped the door firmly

before slamming it shut in his face. She hoped the goddamned bastard had learned not to try and mess with her, and slumped to the ground in front of the door to catch her breath.

Chapter 3

Yautjas were stubborn, and so to make sure Malo had indeed learned his lesson, the next day she would go into the woods prepared. As soon as her master left, Sammi strapped on her specially crafted armor. She grabbed her sword from the wall, admiring its design. The blade was spiralled, making for a clean and efficient kill. There was no need to stab then twist. She wouldn't be able to chop heads off like yautjas anyhow, so this sword worked best for her.

Sammi was looking forward to stabbing Malo, but she grabbed a few other weapons in case the sword did not work. A lot of her weapons were made just for her, to fit in her human hands, lightweight, and some were even of her design from things she remembered of earth. Her master had granted these weapons because they were unique and that made them unexpected. She may not have been as big or strong as a yautja but she was fast, fierce, and somewhat unpredictable to the yautjas.

Hoping this would be enough to escape him again, Sammi marched to the door but almost tripped getting out into the hallway. She braced herself against the doorway and glanced down at her feet. She couldn't help but let out an indignant snort at what she saw. Piled out in the hallway in front of her room was an assortment of fruit on top of a silver fur. Beside that, was a necklace of vertebrae segments.

The necklace looked like the very one Malo had been wearing. They were gifts. They weren't chocolate or love letters, but they were still gifts. Sammi suddenly felt indecisive, feeling bad that she had set out to stab him when he had obviously waited until her master was gone to set things at her door. Sammi scooped up the items and took them inside simply because she didn't want anyone else to see them.

Inside, she debated for a moment, but then threw the fruit and fur in the trash. She would not allow him to provide for her or feed her, and certainly would not wear his necklace. She decided to return the jewelry to him, hopefully conveying that she was not interested. The fact that her had given her gifts though, seemed to indicate that he was determined. She would wait to go back in the woods just to be on the safe side.

She returned the necklace, leaving it at the door marked with his name. Then instead of going into the woods, she waited in her room. When her master returned, he escorted her to dinner. The room was crammed with benches and tables like a lunch room, but was not busy. Yautjas did not eat very often, so the room was only full during special events.

Sammi was trying to avoid her stalker. Unfortunately, out of the five other yautjas in the room, one of them just had to be Malo. He lifted his head as she entered the room, eyes meeting hers-and she shot him back an angry glare. She sat down on a bench a few feet from her master, and kept her head down until food was served, hoping he would leave. Malo wasn't even eating; he was just sitting there, staring, like he had been waiting for her.

Sammi did her best to ignore him, but out of the corner of her eyes she saw him shift. She lifted her gaze, trying not to seem like she was watching him-She didn't want to give him the satisfaction. He scooted down the end of the bench in front of her, getting closer. She would

be surprised if he actually made a move in front of her master, but when she looked back down at her food he made a chuff noise. Sammi glanced at her master who didn't seem to notice Malo was even there, and then she turned to glare at Malo again.

He did not seem fazed by her evil looks, and even dared to scoot closer to her. Besides just looking ridiculous, Sammi finally realized what he was doing. He wanted to talk to her. Nevertheless, she would never sneak away to talk to him so she ate as quickly as she could, wanting to get out of the room and away from him. It did not surprise her that he didn't just give up after that.

Sammi had managed to avoid him for a good day and a half after that dinner, but walking back to her room he finally caught her alone. She felt vulnerable again, dressed in a long light-blue loincloth, a tube top, and without any weapons. She hadn't heard him approach her, and his cloaking device had been engaged so that she couldn't see him. In the hallway, Sammi felt hands press to her skin and her body jerked to a stop. Her heartbeats soared as big, meaty hands slid up her exposed thighs to her hips.

It sent chills running all through her and made her feel completely out of breath. He stood behind her; she could feel the heat from him suddenly. One of his hands gently wrapped around her throat, while the other arm seized her waist. His thumb nail tenderly brushed back and forth under her jaw. It was petrifying-yet, exhilarating somehow. He should have left it at that.

Instead, he dropped the invisibility and the vertebrae necklace replaced his hand around her neck. She didn't want to have his kids. He'd be one to send them off while they were still young to be trained, and all she'd do was be meek and pregnant all the time. Her master would never stand for it anyway. Her anger exploded.

She spun around to face him and yelled, "Stop it!"

Malo just stood there and staring down at her, banded dreads hanging in front of his shoulders. Her chest was heaving as she removed the necklace and tossed it to the ground. After that, his expression changed, mandibles beginning to flare. She could see the chords in his neck drawing tight, but she had to speak her mind. Yautjas were sensitive when it came to respect though, so she knew she was going to regret her words.

"Listen, even if I was remotely interested in kissing that disgusting maw of yours and being your sweetheart, my master wouldn't allow it. I'm not interested, and not available." After that, Sammi held her breath, waiting for his reaction.

His voice was dark, "Owner can't keep you now. Not property. You hunt; you are equal."

"That's not right. If you wanted to claim me as a mate you would have to talk to my master, buy me from him, or challenge him for me. He owns me. I am property."

Malo stepped closer to her as he said, "Were property."

Sammi began to back away from his slow advance, "You can't do this."

"You underestimate me." He growled.

Chapter 4

Sammi flinched as Malo grabbed for her, but his arms merely slipped around her waist and he threw her over his shoulder. Her mind raced to come up with a maneuver that could free her, but all she could do was squirm in his grip helplessly. She kicked her legs and huffed at him, but he paid no attention to her. She considered yanking on his banded dreads, but that more was likely to get her beaten to a pulp instead of released.

He swooped down to grab the vertebrae necklace in his fist, making her stomach do a flip when he stood up straight again. Then when another yautja turned the corner his grip on her tightened and his chest rumbled with a possessive growl. She twisted around to see the other male turn around and head back the way he came even before Sammi could ask for help. She smacked Malo in the head for being rude, but he ignored her of course. Malo carried her through the ornate hallways, walking quickly as though he was on a mission.

When she spotted his bedroom door up ahead, Sammi realized what that mission was. She dug her nails into his back, her heart beginning to slam against her ribcage with fast and frantic beats. She couldn't allow him to bully her into this. She couldn't go down without a fight. Malo slid open the door and carried her inside. One second she was held high up in the air, and then the next he had dumped her onto the furs of his bed.

Malo crawled over her, so Sammi started to thrash and yell at him, "Stop stop! Don't you dare!" When that didn't faze him, she said anything she could that might make him let her go, "I request that there be an official trial!"

Malo was propped up above her and his cold, white eyes bore into her as he asked, "You would challenge me?"

"I..." She had to think a moment about she was about to say.

"Let me breed you now, ooman. Trying to fight me would be reckless."

Sammi snapped, "I would rather be bound to any other yautja than you! Everyone will challenge

you. And if they fail, then yes, I will fight you myself."

Malo let out a snarl before lifting away from her and carelessly shoving her body off his bed. She hit the hard floor with a thunk but stood back up quickly as though she hadn't been affected by it. She combed her fingers through her hair then, glaring at him as she did. Sammi tried to come up with something to say to take back what she'd said, but was at a loss. She walked to the door, needing to go speak to her master about all of this.

Just as she was outside the doorway, Malo asked, "Do you believe whoever wins the trial will suit you as a mate?"

She wouldn't meet his eyes, "Of course."

The yautja believed that the most dedicated mates were the ones who did not back down in a fight. The strongest yautjas were the most capable to protecting their mates and family. She wasn't raised on that philosophy on earth, but she had to hope that if a yautja could fight for her that he would care for her as well. Still, she didn't want to take an alien for a mate. As Malo started to speak, Sammi shook her head at him and then left to go find her master, hoping he would know a way out of this.

"I will win, show you I deserve to have you."

She had little faith that it of everyone in the clan that Malo would win. Of course, not every yautja was going to jump at the chance to have her, but certainly there were others who would fight-Her master especially. Sammi was certain that her master could kick Malo's ass, all she had to do was confess to him the mess she had made of things. She went to his room, finding him standing near the wall of his weapons, strapping on his armour. She closed the door slowly as she entered, trying not to disturb him yet.

"You are late." He hissed.

"I know, but it wasn't my fault." She walked up to him and began to lace up a section of armour on his arm, "I have to talk to you about something."

Baka-au moved his arm out of her reach and took over lacing the armour, "Get yourself properly dressed."

Sammi pulled her long hair back in a ponytail and began to suit up in her sparring armor as she spoke, "A male has been pestering me lately and—"

"Why?" He interrupted her, "Your smell has not changed; you are not ovulating."

"I know, but he says that I'm not considered property anymore, that he has the right to claim me."

Is that true?"

Baka-au paused a moment, then brushed past her to retrieve his mask, "You were never marked. You hunt on your own, taking down worthy trophies. You are ooman, and that would make you property, yet your high status as a hunting partner means you can handle yourself as a female and take on a mate." He placed the dark bronze mask over his face, "Technically, if a yautja wished to mate you, he would have to go to you, not me."

"But I told him that I would hold an open trial. You can't just let any male fight and claim me..."

Her master roughly yanked his combi stick from the wall and pointed it in her direction, "You did that to yourself, and it is not a concern of mine. My skill has risen and I no longer require a hunting partner. You were always temporary."

Sammi's mouth slowly dropped, unable to believe what she'd just heard. As her master headed for the door, she stood where she was, trying to process everything. Malo was right, he could claim her. The most skilled and viscous yautja would win the trial and be her new mate. Her master would not save her.

Chapter 5

All the preparations as well as the date of the trial had been set weeks ago. She had all of her clothes and belongings packed and ready to be moved out of her master's room. Sammi sat on her belly on top of a soft tri-colored fur, holding a glass cube in her palms. Out of all the technology the yautjas possessed, she liked this one the best. It predicted the next days weather and simulated it within the cube.

It wasn't exactly practical, but it was beautiful. Inside the cube, tiny clouds began to stir and darken. They flashed with light and a few bolts of electricity danced within the glass. Tomorrow there would be a storm without rain, not that it mattered much to Sammi. Tonight her mate would be decided and tomorrow she would be doomed. She set the glass cube back on the table to dress for the trials.

She put on a sarong made out of thin, almost transparent gray cloth, tying it in the front just above her breasts, and then sandals. She needed to be appealing to other males, but just wasn't in the mood to put on any jewelry or paint. She quickly pulled her hair back in a ponytail, not wanting to fuss with styling it. After strapping a few weapons to herself in case she did need to fight, she left the room, heading for the pits.

There were different ways to hold challenges, but Sammi had chosen the pits for the location of the trials. They were large circular holes in the dirt where bystanders were kept up above, able to watch, but not crowd the fighters. If she did have to fight Malo after all, she would be able to use the walls to maneuver while a more cramped space would hinder Malo with his large body size. As she walked down into the arena that held the many pits, she was surprised that so many yautjas had shown up. They lined the walkways around the pits and crowded the edges of the room.

Trying not to seem nervous under their watchful eyes, Sammi walked between towering yautjas to seat herself in a throne-like chair in the back. It was time for the trials to begin. The contestants were first matched by rank, pairs of contestants filling each hole. The winners from each round would then fight each other until only one male was left. As Malo walked up to her, she hoped that he would tell her he was going to chicken out on fighting.

Instead, he caught her completely off guard. His hands roughly pinned her shoulders to the back of the chair and he leaned down close to her. As their mouths made contact, she briefly feared that she would faint. Malo stood up straight then, and removed his hands. Sammi was in shock for a second, but then anger flooded in.

She wiped her mouth as though he'd slobbered on her and hissed, "What the hell was that for? Get away from me."

"Had to be done, in case I loose."

Sammi scowled at him as he walked away and climbed down into one of the pits. When everyone had taken their places with weapons ready, a wild roar from one of the watching yautjas signaled for them to begin fighting. She purposely avoided watching Malo, and

instead spotted a younger male that she sort of knew. He had light brown dreads, sea-green eyes, and had been polite to her in the past. On his first match though, he lost.

In the next round, she focused on another male with peppermint red eyes, and lightly blotched tan skin. She had never interacted with him, but had heard good things. He took care of three children on his own after his mate died, while most males would have handed them over to a female family member to be raised. He was a good hunter, with good morals. He advanced to the next round.

She watched him fight again, using two sickle-like weapons to slice into his opponent. Though he was fighting well, her eyes began to wander. The room was filled with grunts and growls, as well as the metallic clash of weapons. Blood was beginning to splash up on the watching yautjas above the pits, and the wounded were carried away for medical treatment. She tried not to acknowledge Malo, who didn't seem to be wounded or tired whatsoever.

There was a yautja in the pit closest to her who was supposed to be the highest ranked out of them all. He wore silver armor outlined in gold with a red loincloth, looking almost like the Romans he was so fond of. Everyone started calling him Wul'ka-nus, after the Roman god of fire and volcanos. He hunted few other places besides the city of Rome, where there were beautiful ruins to climb and unsuspecting tourists to slaughter. She had to admit that his chiseled body and his movements were quite god-like.

Sammi began rooting for Wul'ka-nus to win. He was hot, with light greenish skin, and black and orange blotching. His eyes were like twin fires, a vibrant ruby red. He wielded a smartdisc and a type of brass knuckles. He seemed unbeatable. Wal'ka-nus was defeating his opponents in a few short minutes, and then stood waiting as the rest of them finished fighting.

His opponents were steadily getting more difficult to beat though. For these challenges there were no points, no time limit, and if someone was pinned to the ground they were not out. To win, your opponent had to be knocked out, be unable to get up and fight, dead, or they had to surrender. As the participants began to dwindle, the ones left were the most determined. When one opponent did not yield, Wal'ka-nus killed him. The winner stood proudly as the body was lifted out of the pit and drug away, and then Malo jumped down into the pit with Wal'ka-nus.

Chapter 6

Despite what she may have expected, Wal'ka-nus and Malo were now the only two left. They sized each other up, and even Sammi could tell that Malo was the weaker one. Besides being half a foot shorter than the Roman, Malo was breathing too heavily—almost panting after his last victory. Wal'ka-nus looked completely unscathed, while Malo had finally obtained a few nicks and small wounds. Wal'ka-nus had mastery over his smartdisc, while Malo had only the common wrist blades.

With the metal knuckles in his fist, Wal'ka-nus struck his opponent on the side of the jaw, sending Malo's head snapping to the side. Vibrant green blood ran down from Malo's mouth. A powerful hook punch to the jaw, especially from a yautja, had the potential to snap a person's neck. Malo recovered quickly though, just in time to raise his serrated wrist blades and block the Romans smartdisc from gutting him. Both of them aimed for vital areas, going for the neck and chest.

Though they both had the decency to ignore the dreads and groin area, they were not playing around. Sammi found herself gripping the armrests of her chair, watching as Malo swiped at Wal'ka-nus with the wrist blades only for the Roman to advance on him. Wal'ka-nus had Malo backed up against the side of the pit, and delivered a powerful punch to Malo's face. So close to the side, his head whipped back and collided with the solid dirt wall. Malo wavered, blinking, and then slid to the ground.

Other yautjas had stayed to watch and when they blocked her view, Sammi threw herself out of the chair to squeeze in between them. She stood at the edge of the pit watching as Malo stood to his feet. At every strike, the Roman was getting closer. Sammi found herself wincing as the smartdisc dug into the front of Malo's leg. Then her hands covered her mouth as Wal'ka-nus grabbed Malo by the throat.

Malo broke away stumbling, but still managed to block the Romans next few tries. The whole front of his face and leg were drenched in blood, while Wal'ka-nus only had a few shallow stab wounds from the wrist blades. Sammi flinched as the Roman slammed his fist into the back of Malo's neck, which could have shattered his vertebrae there. Her heart was racing, just watching them fight.

The Roman managed to get behind Malo then, and pinned his arms behind him. He went for the kill, delivering a dropkick to his back without letting the arms go. A move like that could sever the spine, and Malo dropped. The Roman was skilled, managing to twist in mid air so he landed on his front instead of on his back. Then, he bounced back to his feet, prepared incase Malo were to recover.

This time, Malo did not get right back up. He was face down in the dirt, his body limp. Sammi lowered to her hands and knees, trying to see if he was even breathing. She had wanted Wal'ka-nus to win, but was panicked at seeing Malo just laying there so still. The Roman nudged at his body, then rolled him over with his boot, and she could see that he was still alive and breathing.

“Do you yield?” Wal’ka-nus boomed.

Malo’s eyes slowly blinked open and closed, but he did not answer. He lifted his head some, but then grunted and laid it back down. He rolled himself back to his stomach after a moment, then lifted himself to his hands and knees. His back wasn’t broke. He could still fight.

“Get up!” Sammi yelled. “Malo, get up!”

His head lifted, icy eyes slowly met hers, his mandibles twitching with thought, and then he let out an indignant chuff noise. He was probably angry at Sammi for making him fight for her but then cheering him on. He sat up some more, but didn’t stand. As he turned his face away from her, her heart fell. She thought he was giving up.

“Do you yield?” Wal’ka-nus asked again.

“No.” He grunted.

As the Roman launched at him then, Malo let out a ferocious growl and swung his legs to trip him. Wal’ka-nus fell beside Malo and they tumbled, serrated blades clashing against the sharp edge of the smartdisc. Malo pinned the other yautja under him. His sharp wrist blades sliced into the underside of the Romans wrist, cutting tendons. His opponent wasn’t able to hold onto the smartdisc any longer, leaving him vulnerable.

Blood gushing from his wrist, Wal’ka-nus got out from underneath Malo. As they wrestled, Malo reached up and dug the serrated blades into the other yautjas back. Wal’ka-nus was still fighting, slamming the metal knuckles into Malo’s body. Sammi was worried that Malo still might lose, but he got out from under Wal’ka-nus. As soon as he did, Malo pinned Wal’ka-nus on his stomach.

The Romans back was shredded from the wrist blades, bleeding, and a weak spot. Malo used that to his advantage. Keeping Wal’ka-nus pinned, Malo thrust his claws down into the open wound, doing more damage. Wal’ka-nus howled in pain as Malo tore into him, wrapping his fist around vertebrae and yanking. Bones broke in his hand and a segment of backbone and ribs began to lift from the Roman yautjas back.

Sammi was horrified. Wal’ka-nus looked like a dissected cadaver lying in his own pool of blood and it made her stomach churn. Other yautjas helped to haul the body from the pit, and ushered him to a medical room. Human medical care would leave him paralyzed, but the yautjas could regrow severed limbs, mend broken spinal cords, and more. Wal’ka-nus would likely live.

Sammi felt shaky after what she’d seen Malo do, especially because she was about to face him herself. She was optimistic, seeing as Malo was tired and wounded from fighting off other suitors first, but knew better. It had come down to the Roman or her stalker, and she’d chosen Malo. Now, her choice was either be beaten up then mated, or just give in and be mated. Sammi knew that she shouldn’t fight him, but she hoped that if she won against him she might just win her freedom.

Chapter 7

Malo was exhausted, covered in blood, but beamed up at her proudly. He had beaten a yautja that was supposed to be higher ranked than him. As soon as he walked over to the edge of the pit and put his arms on the edge to lift himself out though, Sammi blocked him. He cocked his head to the side, probably thinking that because she had wanted him to win in the end that she'd changed her mind on fighting him. He was wrong.

She had been made into a hunting partner, a warrior. She would fight. Malo hesitated, but then resigned himself back to the other side of the pit. Since she was in a sarong, Sammi brought the fabric up and through her legs, then took two ends of it from behind her and tied it like a belt in front of her. This sort of girding-your-loins style of tying dresses was for emergencies if you needed to fight, run, or climb a tree. Surprisingly though, it turned alright-sort of like stylish shorts with a dress top combined.

"Take off your armor if you want a fair fight, since I'm not wearing any." She demanded.

Malo did not hesitate, and removed the armor. With weapons strapped to her arms, legs, and hips, Sammi jumped down into the pit. The entire bottom of the pit was thick and sticky with green blood. She'd seen a lot of gruesome killings by her master, but never had seen a spine even partly ripped out without being dressed first with precise cuts. That scene replayed in her mind, making her somewhat nervous.

As Malo began to circle her like a vulture, a rush of adrenaline hit her. He wouldn't kill her-but she'd seen yautjas receive deep gashes from their claws, bite marks that hit bone, and torn muscles all just from everyday mating. She knew that he could do some major damage. She kept her breaths calm and deep, and her eyes on her target. Sammi drew out her sword with the twisted blade and positioned herself for a fight with her legs spread some for balance. She knew from experience that stabbing someone actually didn't take a lot of force, unless you hit bone.

Sammi was excellent at fencing, but wielding his wrist blades so was Malo. And he made sure to show off his strength, shoving the serrated blades at her even when she blocked him, causing her to have to take steps back. Surprisingly, stabs to the brain were more often than not incapacitating. She would have to have been lucky to get a perfect shot between his ribs. So she aimed for arteries, tendons, and other vulnerable areas but he was always a step ahead of her.

Malo quickly tired of her sword games and when she left herself open when she blocked his blades, he was able to punch her in the stomach. As she doubled over with the pain, he made sure to pry the sword out of her hand and toss it out of the pit. Sammi's glared at him as he retracted his wrist blades. He wanted hand to hand combat, but Sammi knew she didn't have a chance without a weapon. As she reached for the holster on her leg, Malo attacked.

She felt like a child compared to him, her fists doing absolutely nothing to deter him. He forced her to the ground, and though she trashed, he pinned her on her stomach. With his weight leaning on her, he twisted one of her arms up behind her back. When she tried to push

herself up with the other hand, he scooped up her other arm and held it behind her back too. She tried to get a leg under to roll him off of her, but he was an immovable force.

Sammi struggled for a solid minute, pressure building behind her eyes at feeling so weak, before she realized that she wasn't going to be able to slip out of his grip. Her shoulders were aching, but he was trying not to hurt her. All he ended up doing was making her more furious with him. It was embarrassing to know that other yautjas were watching and she was being treated so gently in a fight. She let her body relax and tried to catch her breath.

As she expected, Malo assumed that he had won and she felt his weight begin to lift away from her. Sammi sprung up from the ground and struck him fast and hard, connecting her fist with his throat. While he was still on his knees, she reared up and kicked him square in the face with enough force to break his tusk-tipped mandibles. His chest rumbled with a dark growl as he stumbled back but stood to his feet. He was over eight foot tall, and now he looked angry.

He didn't want to hurt her, didn't drop his wrist blades, and she could use that against him. He tried to grab her again but she was fast and light on her feet. Every time he tried to pin her, she kicked at his groin, scratched at his eyes, tried to break his fingers, and bit him-all of which made him release her before she could be forced to the ground. Still, all she was doing was offense. Her blows didn't effect him. She could hardly even reach to punch him anywhere.

She had been trained for six years, but he had been training his whole life. She was weak in comparison to him. It was useless, but she wouldn't back down. Malo was getting less and less careful with her, and as he grabbed a hold of her shoulder his sharp claws dug into her skin. Only a small squeak of pain escaped her but Malo instantly let her go.

Blood dripped down her shoulder but she was more angry at him for letting her go than causing her to bleed. Sammi grit her teeth and pulled out a small can-shaped weapon from the holster, discarded the pin, and tossed it in his direction. It was something of her design, resembling flash grenades on earth. She covered her ears just as the object exploded with a bang, and closed her eyes, though she could still see the glow of orange light from behind her lids. It was meant to temporarily blind and disorient an enemy, and it worked perfectly on Malo.

When she opened her eyes, Malo was stumbling back with his arm in front of his face. Her ears were still ringing from the bang, but she could see just fine. Sammi got behind Malo, slipped her hands under his, then locked her hands behind his head. She forced his head forward, bending his neck. It was a move meant to asphyxiate an opponent, cut off the supply of spinal fluid to the brain, or even break their neck. Though Malo was probably still seeing spots from the flash grenade, he knew what she was doing. And he knew that if he passed out, she would be the winner.

He backed up to smash her body against the wall, but she held onto him. Malo grabbed her arms, trying to pry her off but she had her fingers locked together in a death-grip. He slammed her body against the opposite wall, knocking the air of of her, but she still clung to him. When he bent forward to try and buck her off, she wrapped her legs around his waist. Since she wouldn't budge, there was only one thing left for him to do.

Malo jumped up as he leaned back, aiming to throttle her body to the ground under him. Sammi let go too late. The force of the impact broke several ribs, caused the back of her head to bleed, and searing pain shot all throughout her body. Malo stood and hovered over her as he regained his breath. She could hardly breathe, and she cried out in pain as she attempted to stand.

Chapter 8

Her bones felt crushed in, and as though they had punctured her lungs, but her master had forced her to train when her ribs had been broken before. She knew that she could fight through the pain. She winced and as she slowly rose to her feet, but then defiantly stood in front Malo. Her hands balled into fists.

“Yield.” Malo rumbled.

She took in a shaky breath and then shook her head.

“Yield!” He growled.

He still didn’t want to harm her. Sammi grit her teeth in anger and frustration, then grabbed the tiny weapon that had been strapped to her forearm. She would not be babied. Infuriated with his behavior, Sammi lifted the bottle up and aimed it at his face. It was a type of pepper spray gel, another weapon she remembered from earth, and it worked well. Malo snarled as it hit him, and turned his face away but not before it had got in his eyes.

His patience had suddenly vanished, and he came at her like a freight train. His fist collided with the side of her face, sending her crumbling to the ground. For a second she was sure she had blacked out and her head was pounding. There was no doubt that her cheek was flung to swell up like a balloon from that. His chest was rising and falling rapidly as she stood up again.

The burn from pepper spray usually sent anything and everything to its knees. It only made Malo angry. Before she could think to block him, he punched her in the gut. She let out a yelp of pain for her broken ribs, but she refused to let her knees bend. She refused to go to the ground.

Sammi winced as his hand wrapped around her throat, squeezing until she couldn’t breathe at all. His arms were longer than hers, so she couldn’t reach to punch him. She kicked her legs as him, and proud at his fingers from desperation. She was seeing stars by the time he let her go. She fought to stay standing but her vision was blurry and her legs wouldn’t listen.

Sammi collapsed to the bottom of the pit. Breathing was difficult with her broken ribs, but now that she was trying to suck in large amounts of air she was only managing to wheeze. It took her several moments, but she stood. As soon as she got to her feet, Malo delivered a series of merciless blows, ultimately sending her crashing to the ground again. It was getting increasingly difficult to stand, her whole body felt weak and her motivation was dwindling.

But she hadn’t fought when her master had taken her from earth. She had worked in a bank, and as soon as she heard others scream, she ran and hid. Her worst fears up until then were that robber with guns would come, but until then she hadn’t known that yautjas existed. Through the gunshots, screams, and havock she didn’t budge. Her master found her, and drug her to her feet.

He could have killed her, but instead he offered for her to come with him instead. Sammi had been overwhelmed with fear, and agreed to go with him. He walked her out of her hiding spot, past pools of blood and bodies on the shiny tile flooring. There were men in masks and guns dead, as well as bank tellers. She had been cowardly and he had given her strength.

Sammi groaned as she managed to prop herself up. She would never cower again, would never be pushed around again. A yautjas wanted to take her, and she had the will to fight him off this time around. She was already covered in bruises, but this time as he hit her, she heard her own bones break. He punched her in the shoulder, and there was the sickening sound of her collar bone breaking and then the crushing pain.

She couldn't even fight him anymore, couldn't throw any punches or even block him, but she lifted herself off the dirt some. This time, he wouldn't let her try to stand all the way up. His boot crushed down on one of her calves, threatening to break another bone. She whimpered but propped herself up on her arms. Malo stomped down on her with enough force to fracture bone.

She couldn't stand. It hurt to breathe or even to move. She squirmed in the dirt and blood, trying. Malo wrenched up a fistful of her hair, making her look into those icy eyes. He held them both utterly still, waiting for her to make the final decision.

She would not yield. Sammi reached for his sensitive, brown bended dreads for one last attack but he took her out. One last blow to her chest slammed her back, her head hitting the ground and causing her to see stars. She sucked in ragged breaths and began to cough up blood. She was beaten to a pulp, her body riddled with pain.

The adrenaline had masked most of the pain, but it was seeping in on her now and threatening to cause her to pass out. She coughed up more blood, her body arching but she didn't have the strength to turn to her side. Lids half closed, she stared up at the watching crowd of yautjas. There was a spark of hope when she recognized her master's face peering down at her. He had shown up to the trial after all, and she opened her mouth to try and beg him to help her.

No words came out. Her mouth was dry and her throat was sore. Her master could have still fought Malo for the right to keep her. Instead, he sharply turned away, black dreads slapping across his shoulder as he left. Sammi let out a choked sob, feeling just as broken on the inside as her body was on the outside.

Her suitor bent down to claim his prize, spreading out his mandibles at her with a growl. In a daze, she stared at the slick pink insides of his mouth, and then slowly up into his ice white eyes, as cold as his heart. Her body was completely limp in his arms as he scooped her up off the floor. She didn't even try to lift her head. After climbing out of the pit, with her securely in his arms, he let out a bellowing roar of victory.

Chapter 9

Everything hurt, from her swollen face down to her bones. Her muscles were so useless she wouldn't have been surprised if they sloughed off like wet bread. Six years of training and she'd lost. She would be made to carry his offspring and have hybrid babies with an alien. That would be her life from now on.

Sammi's heart sank as Malo carried her past the medical room. Her head dangled down over his arm, and her eyes stayed on the door until he turned a corner. She let out a longing whimper, but Malo didn't so much as glance down at her. He wasn't going to heal her. At least her master had been kind enough to allow her to heal quickly after each torcherous training session.

Malo took her straight to his bedroom. She feared then that she would be raped even in such poor conditions. The yautja didn't always care for such details like healing wounds when it came to their rough mating. She couldn't even hold up her head, but her mind swam with all the horrible things he would do to her. Both times she had been mated by yautjas they had been dominating and rough, leaving her feeling like she'd been hit by a train. She'd heard that some mates will bite and leave scars, leave breeding marks like sharks.

In the room, her eyes locked onto his fur covered bed. It was impossible for her to hold back tears. Malo turned away from the bed though, and hauled her into the bathroom instead. There was a small inground pool in the middle of the room, made out of gorgeous quartz crystal. Shifting her in his arms, he turned on a faucet. The pool began to fill with metallic blue water.

It filled quickly and he stepped down into the water with her. He sat her sideways on his lap, holding her back straight with her head up. She was too weak to swim and Sammi figured that was best-in the water she wouldn't try to struggle as he mated her lest he let her drown. The water soothed her muscles too and would cover up the fact that she was crying.

She waited for him to make a move, to grab her, but he was as still as a statue except for the steady rise and fall of his chest. Under the steaming warm water, the pain began to deaden. It had to be a sort of healing water then. Just when she was starting to relax, Malo pushed her arms so that they were around his neck and then his hand rise to her face. She tensed when he let the water drip onto her cheek, but she had to admit that it fell nice.

Malo brushed his knuckles across her cheek and Sammi was surprised at how she hardly felt it. The metallic blue water was making her numb. When he leaned closer and brushed his mandibles across her forehead though she did feel that and involuntary trembled at his touch. The air pulsed with his rumbling purrs. It was meant to calm her, but she fought against it.

The purring could be as strong as a drug at times, lulling the mind and body. Sammi didn't want him purring to sedate her and then have his way with her. Even in her current state with broken bones she would rather be awake through it, because at least that way she would feel a little less violated. It was putting her to sleep all ready. As he kept on purring, she began to squirm.

He must not have liked that, because he suddenly stood up and carried her out of the quartz pool. Her heart raced at seeing his bed again, but again he merely passed it up. This time, he did take her into the medical room and set her in the machine that looked similar to a CAT scanner. As he positioned her, absolutely nothing hurt. All around her collarbone and ribs were turning purple but she felt no pain whatsoever.

It seemed backwards to pass up the medical room at first, but he had immediately got rid of the pain. Other times she had broken bones it was straight into the medical room for more intense pain as bones were fused and flesh regrew. Yautjas generally didn't believe in anesthetics, wanting to master pain tolerance, so she was surprised that he had used that metallic water. Surprised, but grateful. After that he led her to the dining room and it seemed that he was going to feed her too.

She ate as slow as she could, but in the end that only postponed going back to the bedroom. She drug her feet walking back too, but he ushered her into the room. She stood frozen in the middle of the bedroom, and Malo had to turn around and retrieve her. He reached out to her sort of tentatively at first, but she backed away from him. He firmly grabbed her arm then and began to undo her sarong.

He discarded the light gray fabric to the floor and drug her over to the bed. She wanted to cover herself up with her arms, but he really wasn't staring. Malo picked her up and set her in bed, then began to undress himself. Her heart began to pound. Her fingers dug into the furs.

Most of the yautjas walked around half-naked anyway, and she'd long grown accustomed to that and hardly noticed anymore. But with his jewelry removed and loincloth off, she was finally noticing him. She was really looking at him, all of him.

He was sort of stunning really. He had snowy-white eyes surrounded by a dark ring around the edges, with the slightly hint of blue around the pupils. His light and dark banded dreads hung over his broad shoulders. Her eyes slid down to his sculpted chest, the gray color of his skin and dark blotching. Though his body was lightly pebbled and reptilian, it was still smooth and somewhat soft.

His stance was powerful, his body built with muscle, black claws at his fingertips, and those scars that riddled his body. She bit her lower lip as her eyes traveled farther down. Her heart sped up wildly and she swallowed nervously. He was more than just well-endowed. The appendage that hung between his legs held her gaze in terror.

As he crawled onto the bed, she backpedaled away from him and slipped off the edge. He cocked his head at her in question. She was starting to breathe heavy, but tried to calm her racing pulse. She took a deep breath. It wasn't working.

"I'm going to go to the bathroom!" She declared.

Sammi spun around and raced to the bathroom. She quickly locked the bathroom and braced herself against the door. Sammi just needed a minute. She was too afraid to deny him. It would be easier on her if she just gave in and didn't struggle. It was just sex after all, but she had been dreading this from the start.

Chapter 10

She knew that if she took too long in the bathroom that he would come retrieve her, but she just needed a few minutes alone. She made herself try to use the toilet, and ran the sink water to sound like she was busy. Sammi didn't want to be forced onto her stomach again and have some big brute take her from behind. She certainly didn't want to be pregnant. And what if the baby came out looking more human, and she still had to give it up young to be trained? It was going to tear her apart.

She gripped the edge of the sink, trying not to panic. Sammi once had dreams of falling in love, having passionate sex, honeymooning in Venice, and raising a baby girl. Instead, she was bound to a yautja against her will. Malo had chased her in the woods, then later had cornered her and eagerly taken her to his bed before she'd initiated the trial. She was afraid that he would give her new bruises and scratches as he mated her. There was no way out of it though, so Sammi took a deep breath and walked out of the bathroom.

She had been ready to face a horny eight-foot alien, but instead she stood in the doorway, bewildered instead. Malo was slumped face-down on the bed, his chest rising and falling slowly. He made little huff noises every now and then, practically snoring. Feeling as though she'd avoided a huge ordeal, she let out a sigh of relief. She shuffled towards the bed though, unsure of what she was supposed to do now.

Yautjas were very light sleepers. Sammi froze as one of Malo's eyes peeked open to stare at her. After a moment, he let out a grunt, turned away from her, and seemed to go back to sleep. She walked up to the bed and crawled into the soft furs next to him. She layed on her back with her arms at her sides, staring up at the ornate ceiling.

Sammi couldn't sleep. She just felt to tense, unsure about how Malo was going to treat her. She'd seen other alien mates in collars and chains. She'd heard about alien mates being confined inside while their mates left on long hunting trips. At least with her master she went everywhere with him, seeing new planets.

She knew he would wake up no matter what, but she slipped out of bed as quietly as she could. It might have as well been her last night of freedom, so she was going to try and enjoy it. As expected, Malo popped his head up to watch her. Sammi ignored him, got dressed, and headed for the door. As her hand touched the door, he let out a low growl.

She considered bolting, but said, "I'll be back; I'm just going to get a drink."

She left the room without looking back at him and strolled to the kitchen. There, she piled fruit into her arms and then headed to the wall. The woods were dark and quiet, peaceful. She sat down in her usual spot, and began to break apart a fruit for the critters. The strange bristled worms seemed happy to see her.

She fed them, ate a few pieces herself, then rested her head against the wall and looked up at the trees. The wind was picking up, bringing a cool breeze and rustling the blue-green leaves. Beyond that, the sky was a dark gray with black clouds. The worms were steadily

chewing away at their fruit slices. It was a while before she realized that she had been followed.

This time around, she had grabbed a weapon. She had a pack of small, sharp, metal spikes shaped similar to toothpicks. Sammi had practiced often enough with them to be able to throw them and hit a quarter-sized target from about 15 feet away. They were sharp enough to pierce the yautjas strong skin, but to really do some damage she would have to aim for the eyes. She could hear the scratching of nails on the trees, and slowly grabbed out a few spikes and hid them in her palm.

She was still tired from the fight and not in the mood to be fucked with. Her stalker dropped from the tree branches and all the worms sucked themselves back into the holes, abandoning what was left of their meals. Sammi didn't budge, unable to tell in the dark if it was just Malo or another yautja. She hoped it was Malo. It looked like his height and build.

"Go away." She said.

He let out a snort, similar to a bull. She was sure it was Malo now, and that was his way of saying "no".

"Why are you here? I told you I'd be back."

"Protect you." He grunted.

"I don't need protecting." Sammi stood, holding up one of the spikes in her hand as though she was going to throw it at him.

His body went stiff at the threat, and Sammi knew better than to antagonize him. She quickly dropped her hand and put the spikes back in the case. Malo strode forward, his eyes on the weapon and then her face. He still seemed tense. She felt sort of smug that he didn't trust her not to attack him.

Rather than have him take away her spikes though, she unclipped the case herself and tossed them to the ground. Satisfied, his shoulders relaxed and he closed the gap between their bodies. He took off the bone necklace he had tried to give her before, and slipped it over her head. His nails slid across her skin, giving her chills as he moved her hair out from under the necklace. Sammi took one of the bones in her fingers, fiddling with it as she frowned down at her gift.

To her, that was a symbol of her status. A symbol of her value to him. Yautja females were proposed to and made into mates when the males gave them a skull from one of their mighty kills. She'd witnessed males giving females skulls that were bigger than they were. But Malo offered her vertebrae, scraps instead.

Malo's arms went around her body and he leaned down to touch his mandibles to her collar bone. His skin was growing warm, telling her that he was becoming aroused. Sammi stood stiff as a board in his embrace, merely closing her eyes as she felt his tongue lash across her neck. A steady purr was building inside him. She tried to distance her mind from what was about to happen.

His hands toured her body, squeezing her ass, cupping her breasts, and sliding between her thighs. She focused her eyes on a tree in the distance and hardly felt his touch. His teeth

lightly nipped at her neck as he bumped his hips up against her. When he tried to get his mandibles close to her face she turned away. He was not the least bit deterred.

She thought she was ready to let him go throw with it. However, as his hands began to untie her serong her hands jerked up and shoved at his chest, “Please, can we just wait until tomorrow... I just... feel sort of tired and sick to my stomach. I wouldn’t want to throw up on you.”

Malo hesitated, then released her. He began to walk out of the woods but then stopped to look back at her to make sure she was following. Surprised that he would listen to such a lame excuse, she almost forgot her pack of spikes. She scooped them off the forest floor and walked after Malo. Sammi followed behind him, and he escorted her back to bed.

Chapter 11

In the morning, Malo tried to wake her up and initiate sex again. His arm wrapped around her waist and he drug her closer. He pressed his face into her hair as he inhaled her scent. His body was warm against her bare skin. She had to admit, as far as wake-up calls went, his was pretty sweet.

Still, she wiggled to get away from him and said, “Leave me alone. Humans need more sleep than you guys.” It was true, but she exaggerated to get out of any sexual obligations, “If you wake me up now I won’t be able to make it through the day without passing out from sleep deprivation!”

Malo huffed but moved away from her and Sammi rolled herself in the furs to make sure he didn’t come back. When she heard him moving about the room, Sammi peeked open her eyes to spy on him. She watched him dress. He put on a loincloth that looked to be made out fish scales, metal cuff bracelets, a belt of small bones, and some armor pieces. He turned towards her and Sammi quickly shut her eyes to pretend she was asleep.

When she opened her eyes, he was gone. Sammi tried to sleep in as late as she could, knowing that when she got up that Malo would try to mate her. He was in and out of the room every now and then, probably checking on her. Each time he entered, she closed her eyes and pretended to be sleeping. For the most part, he let her be.

When she was finally too restless to stay in bed, Sammi used the restroom, dressed, and hoped to sneak out of the room before Malo came back. Before she could reach the door though, he came strolling in. Seeing her finally awake, he walked up to her and made a soft trill. His claws began to remove the clothes she had just put on. Her stomach tied in nervous knots.

She doubted that he would stop, but she had to try, “I’m starving.”

Malo stopped moving. It was such a pitiful excuse, so Sammi glanced up at his face to see if he was angry at her. His tusk-tipped mandibles clicked together as he thought about it. After a few seconds, he reached up and combed his fingers through her hair. Then, he grunted, and turned towards the door.

He led her to breakfast, where she took her time eating, and when he tried to bring her back to the room she said, “I still have to get my stuff from my old room.”

Malo grumbled.

“Clothes, shoes, feminine products, my weapons, armor, jewelry, nick-nacks...” he did not seem convinced. Worried that she would never get her stuff back, she added, “Everything is already packed. I just have to carry it to your room.”

Malo dipped his head down some, giving her consent. He let her lead the way. The door still unlocked to her presence, but wouldn’t allow Malo inside. She was tempted to hide in

there all day, but instead tossed out bags of stuff for him to help carry. When everything was in Malo's room, she began to organize.

Malo was getting more rowdy though, and had different ideas about what they should have been doing. She bent down to pick up her clothes from the bag and put them in the drawer. As soon as she did, Malo's arm wrapped around her waist and hauled her in the air. Her first reaction was to scream and kick at him, but Malo held onto her. Her heart was racing as his teeth nicked her neck.

His skin was burning hot, and a heady musk hung in the air. His aggression was quickly rising in tandem with his lust, and Malo turned to throw her onto the bed. Sammi was momentarily disarmed, her breathing shallow. Malo had a hungry look in his eyes before he sprung towards the bed. Sammi quickly rolled off the bed and backed away.

"Whoa, hold on!" She held up her palms, hoping that he wouldn't pursue her off the bed, "I haven't even put all my stuff away and I'm still in the clothes I fought in. They have green and red blood stains, then they got wet in the tub, and dried on the floor..."

Malo crawled off the bed and went up to her. Sammi held her breath as he slowly traced a nail across the top of her breast, causing a mortifying tingle to race down her spine. But then he backed away, and started to place her clothes in the wall drawers. Trying to buy more time, she rearranged the clothes according to color, style, and function. She organized everything perfectly, and when she started to polish her armor Malo finally got bored and left the room.

By the time he got back, Sammi told him she was ready for lunch. Malo led her down to the dining room, then sat across from her and watched her eat. As usual, she ate slowly, buying her time. However, everything from his facial features to his posture indicated that he was becoming impatient. He wanted her, and she didn't think that she would be able to stall it any longer.

Malo escorted her back to the bedroom, but instead of ripping her clothes off, he grunted, "Must attend legal proceeding."

He was leaving her alone for the yautja equivalent of jury duty. Sammi seized the opportunity to get out of the house-and didn't return until it was dinner time for her. Malo wasn't happy about that, but he feed her immediately. Afterwards, she convinced him to train with her, lest she go soft and start to gain unhealthy weight. Proceeding sparing, she requested a shower.

It was still technically daylight outside, yet yautja days were twice as long as earth's, and Sammi came out of the shower yawning. She knew Malo was waiting for her in anticipation, but she went straight for the bed. Sammi wrapped herself up in the furs, then blinked at him. He did not look happy, and Sammi got a pang of guilt at having avoided him, but turned to face the other way. She laid there tense until she heard him leave the room.

Chapter 12

The next couple of days passed relatively the same way, with Malo being busy and Sammi continuously making up excuses not to sleep with him. One evening though, he just sort of snapped. Sammi wasn't sure what set him off-if she'd pushed her limits, or if she was fertile and he could sense it-but as soon as he entered the room she could tell he was acting different. His stance was tense, his eyes were alert.

He was in hunting mode. His eyes locked onto her with a strange sort of intensity, and Sammi stopped what she was doing to watch him. He looked like he had been previously training, his chest heaving, and he had a few tiny wounds with dry green blood on them. He crept towards her, and when she started to move he shadowed her. Sammi knew that meant he would chase her if she ran.

"Are you ok?" She asked wearily.

He crept closer. She could tell that he was on edge, and thought maybe it was anger. His hands clenched and unclenched at his sides. A lot of yautjas had destructive tempers, but Malo had always seemed calm and under control. Now that he wasn't, it was scaring her.

"You stink of other males." He growled.

Sammi vigorously shook her head.

"Did another male touch you?"

"No."

He was steadily getting closer, his mandibles spreading like he was going to roar at her in anger. She hadn't even been around any yautjas except for a fight that she watched earlier. Only then had she stood between males, but yautjas had that testosterone-like hormone that was for aggression as well sexual desire. And they had a keen sense of smell, so Malo was smelling their hormones on her.

Malo was guarding the exit, and that left her very few places to go. In the bathroom, she would be trapped easily. She definitely did not want to lead him into his personal weapon room. That left her with his trophy room. She hoped that in there he wouldn't be too rough with her lest he break the skulls.

Sammi bolted, skirting around the bed, and shoved open the door to the weapon room. Once inside, she turned sharply to take the other door that led into the trophy room. Malo was right at her heels. The walls looked like the inside catacombs, with carved shelves filled with skulls and other bones decorating the edges like macaroni art. One skull near the farthest wall laid on the ground, too large to put on a shelf or hang.

In his anger, her master had once picked her up and thrown her against the wall. Her hope was that Malo wouldn't be able to do that with all the delicate trophies in the room. The huge skull on the ground was bigger than she was. Careful not to touch it, Sammi sat down on the

floor, wedged between it and the wall. Malo was fuming, but he slowed down as soon as he caught sight of where she was.

“Come here ooman.”

“I swear I didn’t touch anyone and no one touched me.”

“Come here! Ooman, you make me fight for you then disregard my affection. I will not wait any longer. We will mate right now.”

Sammi didn’t budge, “No.”

Malo paced in front of the skull a few times before crouching down in front of her, “I was told that ooman females were always weak and submissive. An acquaintance of mine had several ooman pets that he let my friends and I play with. With them it was easy-a little purring and grabbing and they’d get into position. We would fuck them for a few minutes and leave.”

She had never heard him talk so much, and he continued, “I never wanted an ooman pet until I saw you. You were different, strong enough to be a mate and so I would make sure you became my mate. I was told not to waste any trophies on you, as it wouldn’t be necessary. Oomans hold no value to skulls.” He placed his palm on the muzzle of the giant skull, “With this trophy, I could propose to the daughter of a clan leader, arbitrator, or elite. I want you more every day. If you like the skull, I will give it to you.”

Her eyes flickered to the side, looking over the huge skull. If he did give it to her, her status would be equal to a yautja female. She would have access to his funds, have free rein outside the house without being accompanied, and more. If she was looking for a grand gesture from him that truly said he cared about her, this was it. She looked back at Malo, who no longer seemed as angry, and decided to take her chances with him.

Sammi squirmed out from the space between the skull and the wall, hoping that he was being sincere about what he’d said. Yautjas weren’t known to be liars. Malo stood up and inched closer to her. Sammi hesitated though, and he cocked his head at her. She looked up into his eyes, wondering how far she could push him.

“I want to keep the children. Raise them, train them.”

“My great grandfather is an elite. He taught my grandfather, my dad, and me. Everyone he has trained passed their chiva. He will train our children as well.”

“You will train them.”

He let out a short growl and said, “We would need to move out of the clan house if we have many offspring.”

“Is it a deal then?”

Malo grunted.

“Is that a yes?”

“Yes. Now come here. You reek of other males and I wish to bathe you in my musk alone.”

As soon as Sammi stepped forward, Malo grabbed her and reeled her in, firmly holding her against his body. His hand grabbed a fistful of her hair and tipped her head up to him.

"You are mine. My mate." He let his mandibles brush her cheek and added, "Don't fear me. I always protect you."

Sammi hadn't realized until then how tense she had gone in his arms, but she quickly relaxed her shoulders and leaned her body against him. She had forgotten what she'd been told about yautja mates—that they were possessive, yet protective. That they were rough, but caring. She'd been told this, but had never seen it first hand. All she'd seen from males was strength and blood.

Chapter 13

His hands claimed her hips, and his chest pulsed with a light purr as his fingers began to play with the band of cloth holding her skirt on. He slowly slid it down, inch by inch. Either he was being cautious because it was the first time he had held her in his arms without her struggling, or he was taking his time just to enjoy it. The skirt finally dropped to the floor in a pile at her feet. His hands went for her top next, his hands sliding up her thighs, trying to touch as much skin as possible.

His big hands slid the cloth over her head, then let it drop to the ground. Naked in front of him this time, he was staring, but she didn't want to cover herself up. She liked the way his white eyes were greedily looking at her body. His purring was replaced by low, guttural noises from him and Sammi was proud that she had that effect on him. He reached out to touch her bare skin.

He slid his hands over her like he was painting her body; no area was left untouched. Her skin felt more sensitive when aroused, and she enjoyed the feel of his reptilian hands on her. He roughly grabbed her forearm then and hauled her in front of the skull, spinning her around to face it. He bumped her closer, until her legs were straddling the muzzle of the huge skull. Malo pressed close, bending her over, and he guided her hands onto the smooth surface of the bone.

He had her bent over in a police frisk position, straddling an enormous wolf-like skull. Her heart was pounding. Sammi stared into the eye sockets of the skull as she listened to Malo undressing behind her. His musk hung thickly in the air around them. His warm touch promptly returned, pawing at her in an almost massage-like way.

Her body was betraying her. Despite trying her hardest to avoid him earlier, there was tingling in every nerve of her body and gathering between her legs. Her center was warm and wet with anticipation. Her breathing kicked up a notch as his sharp nails trailed down her sides. His hot breath was on her neck, and his tongue flickered across a vein.

Malo palmed her breasts deliberately, and traced his thumb around her nipples. She was reacting to him, wanting him more than she would have liked to admit. His strong arm reached around her middle to flick his fingers at her swelling, sensitive bud. She fought the urge to squirm or make any indecent noises. His other hand reached to guide his hard, throbbing cock, rubbing it sensually through her folds.

When his dick was slick with her juices, he began to push inside her. Sammi remained still, trying to stay relaxed and not clench her walls at the intrusion. His large size wasn't exactly painful, just uncomfortable to her. His fingers rubbed and played with her clit still, trying to keep her aroused. Sammi braced herself, as this was usually where yautjas began to hump and stuff their huge cocks into her ruthlessly.

Instead, Malo ground his hips against her slowly, letting her get used to his girth. Her walls were stretching to accommodate more of him, and she began to like the feeling of being filled

up. He nuzzled her shoulder, deeply inhaling her scent as though she smelled like cookies to him. It was strange, sort of animalistic, and somehow very arousing.

Malo slowly urged more of himself inside her, testing his boundaries. He grabbed a fistful of her long hair then, and pinned her down, firmly but gently. The silence was filled with his deep throated groans as he rocked his hips, sliding in further each time. Sammi let her eyes flutter closed.

She gasped suddenly when he pushed in too forcefully, and Malo halted. He let go of her hair, purring at her. She didn't object when he slowly started to pump into her again, so he quickly picked up the pace, though careful not to ram into her too deep. Malo leaned over her to lightly bite her neck, and she let out a squeal. He seemed to like that, and pumped into her more vigorously.

He was grunting like an animal, resting some of his weight on her back. But then he suddenly yanked her upright, holding her against him as he pounded into her. His tongue licked at her neck up to her ear. He had her panting. Sammi lifted her arms up around his neck, lightly feeling his dreads with her fingertips. As his hand reached down to touch her clit she almost cried out.

Malo manhandled her again, shoving her back down against the skull with her arms propping her up some. His meaty hands grabbed both her shoulders for stability as he fucked her. His thrusts jostled her body, and made her tits jiggle under her. Her mouth hung open, but her eyes were squeezed tightly shut. Her elbows were growing weak having to hold herself up but she wanted more.

Her whole body was quaking, her breaths labored. She whimpered with the building pleasure. She straightened her arms, pushing her hips back against him, desperate for more of him to be inside her. He gladly obliged, wrapping his arm around her waist to hold her close as he thrust the last few inches of his cock inside her. He moaned in satisfaction, then brought the length of him out of her passage slowly, only to ram it back inside her.

It caused Sammi rise up onto her tiptoes, and again his girth slid out of her channel slowly, then he fed his cock back into her tight slit with one forceful swoop. She panted and moaned with every stroke. Malo hammered into her forcefully now. Sweat was collecting on her brow. Her breaths were ragged.

Finally, a tremor ran through her body, giving her that blissful release and Malo was behind her to hold her up as her knees bent. Her whole body was buzzing. She slumped his his arms, trying to catch her breath. Malo scooped her up, carried her to the bed, and gracefully climbed above her.

He situated his body between her legs with his elbows propping himself up. His light and dark brown banded dreads hung down around her face. Sammi had a blush of pleasure on her

cheeks as she started up at him. His body was still warm to the touch, and she let her fingers explore the contours of his biceps. He had been gentle, but then rough when she needed it, and Sammi regretted having waited so long to mate with him.

Chapter 14

When they finally made it out off bed, Sammi's stomach was growling, and so dinner was the next thing on their agenda. Malo absolutely refused to hold her hand down the halls, but Sammi was still happy to walk beside him. They ran into her former master before they could reach the dining room. As soon as he turned the corner and saw them, his face contorted into an ugly sneer. He looked like he was already in a bad mood and seeing her just made it worse.

"I can smell that you've finally mated her-I heard that she eluded you for days after the trial. I guess even an ooman has a sense of who is a desirable for a mate and who isn't."

She wouldn't have been surprised if he insulted her, but instead he was insulting her mate. Malo instantly grew tense at her side, as yautjas always seemed to take insults to heart-but Sammi got fired up first. She jumped in between Malo and her former master, her hands balled into tight fists.

"Oh fuck off! Malo is a better mate then you will ever be!"

Her former master let out a low growl, but then brushed past them both to continue his way down the hall. Sammi glared at his back until he turned a corner and disappeared from view. She let her shoulders drop and relaxed her hands. Then, she looked up at Malo. He was just looking down at her with his head tilted down and slightly to the side.

"What?" She asked.

"Strange. Never seen such a small creature get so aggressive to protect a yautja twice its size."

"Well..." She didn't really have anything to say back. He was right-he was an eight foot yautja and could defend his honour all by himself. "I hate that guy."

"It is impressive that you would stand up to him."

"Na, he couldn't do anything to me that he hadn't done already. What is there to be afraid of?"

"He hurt you?"

Sammi crossed her arms in front of her chest as she stared at the floor, "Plenty of times, but it doesn't matter."

Malo stepped forward and wrapped his arms around her to say, "I could teach you how to best him in a fight."

A wicked smile crept to her lips, but she said, "I can defeat young bloods, recently blooded yautjas maybe, but him... I don't think so."

"I can defeat him, and I can teach you how to do the same."

She shook her head, "No thanks."

Malo's posture straightened, and his voice darkened, "Think I can't train you better than he did?"

She placed her palms on his chest, "Don't get all worked up; I have no doubt in your skill... But I'm just done with fighting."

"Given up?"

"No, its not that. Fighting was just never my thing. Before he took me from earth, I had never even punched anyone. Kids on the playground would push me or scream in my ear, in highschool I was occasionally picked on, but I never fought back... though I did purposely trip a girl once... So you see, I just don't want to fight anymore."

Malo was silent for a moment, but then he perked up and asked, "Would you like me to beat him up for you?"

Sammi giggled at such an obscene thought, but Malo turned and stormed off in the direction her former master had gone. She stood there with her mouth hanging open for several seconds, and then she sprinted after him. Malo paused at each intersection to determine which way Baka-au had gone, then marched down the stretch of hallways. Even when they caught up to Baka-au, Sammi still didn't believe Malo would just up and fight him suddenly. However, Malo grabbed his shoulders and yanked him to the ground.

Baka-au let out a snarl and was back on his feet in an instant. He swung at Malo several times, but one hit from Malo had him falling back into his ass. Baka-au tried to grapple with Malo's leg to bring him to the floor. Malo simply bent his knees and shifted his weight so he was brought down softly. Then, he launched himself on top of Baka-au and began to pound his fists into his face.

When Malo stood up, he didn't have so much as a scratch on him. Fluorescent green blood oozed from Baka-au's mouth as he scrambled to his feet and began to back away. They stood at a standstill for several moments until Malo let out a snort like a bull and Baka-au wiped his mouth and turned away to leave. Sammi had never realized how weak her former master was in comparison to Malo, and how cowardly he was. Still, she glared up at Malo.

Her former master had done little to prompt a beating from him. Malo was still the brute that had killed that hunting hound, stalked Sammi, chased her, and carried her to his bed. He stood before her now, looking proud to have gotten revenge for that tiny insult. She couldn't help but think about how many bad habits he was going to pass onto their kids. Sammi would be raising little monsters.

"Your awful," She said as she shook her head, then added, "in the best sort of way."

Malo let out a soft trill.

After dinner, it was back to the bedroom. Even though she had come to accept Malo as her mate, that didn't mean that she had stopped messing with him. She still enjoyed teasing and taunting him. His skin was warm to the touch under her fingertips, and only grew hotter the farther down her hands traveled. She followed down the V of his hips until she felt the bulge under his loincloth.

She touched him all over, sweeping her hands over his muscles but always returning to fondle his cock a little to make sure he was still remaining aroused. She could see him getting

more tense by every passing second, so ready to pounce on her. Sammi teased him, sliding her fingers through his hair, but shoved his hands off her when he tried to touch her body. Then, when she had him on the edge, she tortured him.

"Well, I'm off to sleep." She suddenly turned around and climbed in bed.

As she got comfy, she watched him standing there out of the corner of her eye. She fought her hardest not to smile or laugh at him. Malo stood there utterly still, right where she'd left him in the middle of the room. His loin cloth was a tent concealing his erection. Eventually, he grumbled and turned to sulk in the weapon room.

Sammi had to act fast. As quietly as she could, she moved her shoes in front of the trophy room door, then slipped out of her skirt and left it in a pile a few feet away. In front of the bathroom door she left her tube top, somewhat making a line of clothes. After that, Sammi drew a steamy bath and then waited naked in the tub for him. It took a few minutes for him to realize what she'd done.

Malo peeked in the bathroom holding a piece of her clothes in his hand, looking puzzled.

"Get in the tub with me." Sammi breathed.

Malo stripped in a second, then surged into the water after her. "You tricked me." He growled.

Sammi couldn't help but smile up at him, "So? What are you gonna do about it?"

He wrapped his arms around her, lifted her up by her ass cheeks, and held her against him. "Your body is mine tonight." He purred, "I intend to claim your body so often that the smell of my musk on your skin is permanent. I do not intend to stop fucking until a child grows inside you."

Chapter 15

Sammi was pregnant faster than either of them expected. Around six weeks later, Malo woke her up in his usual fashion. He climbed back in bed, wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her close. Then, he would brush his fingers up and down her body until she finally paid attention to him. He was always impatient as he waited for her to wake up.

Sammi shifted in his embrace, blinking until she could clearly see his ice-white eyes. Malo grunted, which was his usual invitation to follow him out of bed. As she stood up though, her stomach seemed to do a series of flips. She froze on the bed, uncertain at first, but then ran to the bathroom. Her head hung above the toilet, her empty stomach contracted, and she threw up stomach bile. Her stomach was in sickening knots still, but after a minute she straightened up and wiped her mouth.

"That is a good sign." Malo purred.

It was her turn to merely grunt as a reply. He wasn't the one puking his guts out.

As her belly grew in size, Malo's aggression revved up a few notches. Malo changed from her stalker to her shadow, as Sammi could not so much as leave the room without him guarding her. As they walked down the halls together, he growled at every passing male. They never have him a glance, so she assumed that sort of possessive display was normal for yautjas when their mates were pregnant. And if there was ever a fight in the halls, Malo quickly corralled her away.

When it was time for delivery, Sammi got her wish to have a baby girl. It wasn't the tiny pink human baby she had grown up expecting to have, but it was still her beautiful baby girl. The child came out looking fully yautja, with the ridged forehead, mandibles, and reptilian skin. She had pinkish-red colouring around her mottled spots. The only human features she could find was the color of her eyes, as they were a light caramel-brown like Sammi's.

After much back and forth debating, and Sammi trying to decipher Malo's many grunts, huffs, and grumbles, they finally decided on a name. The baby girl would be called Pruu. She was a wiggly, fussy, loud little thing. Though she looked yautja, she acted more like a human baby. Only Malo's purring could get her to stop wailing and finally get her to sleep.

He cradled the tiny yautja in the crook of his arm with his head bowed as his chest vibrated with a deep and steady purr. The baby girl scrunched her eyes closed, and bounced her legs in protest. However, she quickly succumbed to the lulling effect of the sound and her body went limp in his arms. He placed Pruu in her crib, lingering for only a moment to brush his knuckles on her cheek before turning to Sammi. She started to smile up at him, but something in his expression made her hesitate.

Malo placed his hands at her neck, lightly cupping her face, "I have to leave for a short period."

"Leave? What for?"

Malo turned his face away and huffed, “War.”

“What do you mean?”

Malo looked back at her but didn’t speak.

“Don’t give me that silent shit. I can’t read your mind. What do you mean, war?” When he still didn’t answer, she shoved at his arm, “Malo, I’m serious.”

“As am I.” He snapped.

Her heart was beginning to race, “Pruu is only a few weeks old—you can’t just leave me.”

“Have to.”

“Why?” She begged.

A growl rumbled from him before he said, “Clan territory at risk, clan leaders youngest born was killed. I must go. They know I have an ooman mate and newborn pup. They would not send me on a high-risk mission. I will return shortly.”

Sammi shook her head at him, “Don’t go.”

He drew in a deep breath, and then his voice softened as he said, “War is inconsequential. Everyone dies eventually, and when there is death there must be procreation afterwards.” Malo’s posture straightened and he puffed out his chest as he added, “But I will not die.”

Only he would be cocky enough to sound so sure. Sammi on the otherhand, was not so certain. She couldn’t get Pruu to fall asleep on her own, nevertheless support herself monetarily. She felt like she’d just only met Malo, and now he’d be taken away. Deep down, she just knew something bad was going to happen to him.

Despite her bad feelings about letting him leave, she kept quiet. There was no deterring him. He adorned the mesh netting, full armour, and multiple weapons. Yautjas were never the type to get gooey over goodbyes. Malo’s eyes went to his newborn daughter, then to Sammi, and then he swept himself out of the room.

Sammi sat down on the bed, feeling as though she could hardly breathe. When Pruu began to cry, she quickly went to try and calm her but without Malo her attempts were useless. Pruu kept her constantly occupied throughout the days, but in her spare time she logged into Malo’s bio mask feed. She fast forwarded through most of it, only wanting to know that he was alright and not wanting to see all the blood and guts. Still, the bits and pieces she saw made her angry.

Malo hadn’t said anything about being at war with other yautjas. Day after day she watched him fight and subdue other menacing, eightfoot, reptilian aliens. She would have felt better if he was fighting other strange aliens rather than his own species. His own species was familiar with the weapons, his fighting style, and knew his weaknesses. Malo was beat to the ground and didn’t get up.

Her heart lept in her throat as she stopped fastforwarding and played the bio mask recording at normal speed. She couldn’t see Malo’s body from his perspective, couldn’t see how badly he was wounded, but knew he was lying in the ground on his side. About ten feet away, a yautja walked in front of him, retracted what looked to be some sort of computer

tablet from his back, and tossed it to the ground. The yautja tapped his fingers on the wrist controls. After a moment, the tablet began to react.

An ornate stone pillar grew from the tablet, looking like part of ancient ruins that had been there forever. She watched, horrified as they picked up Malo's body and tied his wrists and legs. They strung him up on the pillar, and then all she saw was the dry, cracked earth under him. He didn't move or shift, and so she didn't even know if he was alive. She fast forwarded to the end of the recording until she hit real time.

Sammi couldn't breathe, couldn't move. She stood, horrified, staring at the screen, waiting for any sign of life from him. Finally, his head lifted. He looked to one arm and then the other, testing the restraints. Then, he lifted his head up to stare at the brick red sky and blazing sun above him.

Chapter 16

Malo had fought for her and proved that he was a dedicated mate even though he could have died in those trials. That roman yautja would not have hesitated to kill him. Now, her mate was on don't foreign planet and likely wounded pretty bad. They had left him crucified to a pillar in the desert when he had a few week old baby girl to get back to. Sammi would be damned if she let him die without at least trying to help.

Everything seemed to be getting in her way though, and it made her frantic. The planet Malo was on was a problem. He was right in the middle of the territory they were fighting over, so enemies would be in the area. She worried that someone would finish him off before she could get to him. And if they didn't run into enemies on the ground, there was a good chance that they would shoot at the ship as she arrived or as they tried to leave.

Secondly, the planet was a hodgepodge of scorching desert with small scattered oases with shady cover. In the desert areas they would be in danger of dehydration, burns from the intense sun and the planet also had poisonous plants. In the rainforest-like oases they had to worry about quicksand, large carnivores, and venomous insects. Sammi would have to rely on the survival lessons her former master had drilled into her head. Besides, all of that was a danger if she could even leave at all-clearance was required to leave for all hunts and she didn't know if they would stop her from leaving the yautja home planet.

However, her biggest issue with going to retrieve Malo was her baby Pruu. She was breastfeeding her every three hours. Desperately, she looked for someone to watch her, but no one she knew to ask could help her. Sammi didn't know how to leave her behind. She couldn't possibly take her along-but she was running short on time.

She went through all the steps her former master always took before a trip with lightning speed. She loaded necessary weapons and gear, briskly checked the ship maintenance, the supply of medicine, food and water, etc. Then, she took a deep breath and lifted Pruu out from her crib. Cradling the infant in her arms, she carried her into Malo's ship. He had left it in the hanger, as they had taken a bigger ship to the planet and dropped Malo and the other yautjas down in pods.

His ship was equipped with a security system that would allow her to leave Pruu inside protected as she went to help Malo. Sammi sat down in the control room chair with the fussing child. The elevator brought the ship to the roof of the house, and then it ascended into the sky. Sammi held Pruu against her chest, begging that they did not shoot her out of the sky for leaving without clearance-She had never disobeyed that law and did not know the consequences of her actions yet.

She held her breath as the craft flashed warnings, saying that she was not allowed to leave the planet. Sammi panicked and shoved the ship into full throttle. The planets sensory system killed the engine as she reached space. Her heart raced. She tapped on the controls.

"No," she breathed. "No!"

They weren't going to let her save him. In space, the ship slowly floated away with the momentum from pushing it in full throttle. The ship gently began to rock forward, beginning to roll. Her heart was aching in her chest. When Pruu began to cry, she rocked her and cooed to her in a hushed voice.

The hologram controls flickered suddenly, and Sammi lifted her head to study them. They had froze when she left the planet but were now slowly scrolling. Daring to hope, she reached out and tapped her finger on a blue symbol. She heard the engine roar to life, quickly kicking back into full throttle. She let out a shaky exhale, then began to log into Malo's bio mask feed.

He was still alive, shifting his head every now and then. She rubbed her fingers on the bottom of Pruu's soft feet as she nervously watched the hologram screen. After a minute a message popped up, stopping the video. It informed her that she would be unable to reenter the planet's atmosphere without explicit clearance-or the ship would be obliterated. It didn't matter. Once Malo was safe, everything would be alright.

She tracked Malo's signal, steering the ship in his direction. It would only take her a day to reach him. She hoped that Malo could hold out that long. In the meantime, Sammi tried to calm Pruu and watched the ships main screen.

There were so many stars, some just being born, others dieing. A star's birth was uneventful, a slow ember growing in a dense cloud of gas. A stars death however, was beautiful. It was a grand, colorful explosion and a gradual scattering of pieces.

Pruu distracted Sammi's dark thoughts by beginning to wiggle and make odd gurgling noises. Sammi feed her, which cleaned her down some but she was still fussy. She rocked and hummed to her as she watched the light fog swirl around her feet. The dimly glowing orange lights of the ship were putting Sammi to sleep, but didn't seem to affect Pruu. Though only an infant she seemed to want to crawl or roll around. Sammi missed Malo already-and not just because he could get Pruu to fall asleep.

It had been days since she'd seen him in person, touched him, smelled him-yet somehow it felt like years had gone by. She was so afraid that he would already be dead by the time she reached him. She loved him. She had never said it outloud, nor had he, but she felt it melting her very core. She loved him, and so he just couldn't die.

Chapter 17

They were finally nearing the planet, and so Sammi dressed in her homeostasis netting, armor, and the wrist controls. She attached every weapon she could to herself, as well as other necessities like a medical kit, water purifier, and a device to start fires. She couldn't see them, but the ship detected several other yautja crafts in the vicinity. Her breathing was shallow, tense. She didn't know which ships were on her side or enemies.

Her ship began to flash and buzz with warnings-it seemed that every other ship had their weapons pointed at her. Her heart began to pound wildly. It seemed that they didn't know what side she was on either. Too nervous to cruise past them and hover closer over to the spot Malo was, she had the ship descend as quickly as it could. She watched the planet grow bigger, then closer the deserts and trees zipped under them.

She did not land fast enough. One of the other ships fired at her, demolishing the force field in an instant. The ship began to shake and rumble and Pruu started to wail. Sammi ran and scooped up the baby, holding her tight to her chest as the ship crashed into the trees. It seemed almost in slow motion as the craft nose dived and then began to cartwheel.

The gravity control was still enabled, making sure that they did not get flung around inside. However, as the ship came to a halt, the control holograms died out, and the orange lights in the terminals vanished. Rays of sunlight leaked in from the cracks the ship had acquired. Sammi stood there shaking for a moment, then scrambled to examine Pruu. The baby girl was crying hysterically, but she couldn't find a scratch on her-They were both still alive and ok.

Sammi checked the controls next, trying to operate the ship and get it to repair itself, but it just had no life to it whatsoever. Sammi gave up after a minute and covered her mouth with her hand. Their way back home was destroyed... She wouldn't let that get her down. With a deep breath, she strapped Pruu to her back, kicked down the door, and bravely ventured out into the jungle.

Using her wrist controls, she could follow Malo's signal. She begged, hoped, and prayed that he would be alive when she got to him. Whoever shot her down might have decided to investigate who they had shot down, so Sammi moved stealthily through the brush. Other enemies would be on the ground and would hence heard her crash as well. She remained silent and hidden, until Pruu began to fuss.

There was no way to keep her quiet, so Sammi switched tactics. She ran through the jungle, going as quickly as she could without jostling Pruu too much. And to her surprise, the movement seemed to actually put Pruu to sleep. Sammi tried to go in a straight line to reach Malo, yet the terrain didn't allow for it. Some of it was unbelievable, like nothing she had ever heard of our encountered before.

First of all, the water acted different. When it was still and undisturbed, something about its chemical make up caused it to heat up until the point of boiling. Oceans and lakes bubbled

and ponds boiled until they evaporated. Moving water acted in the opposite way. Streams and rivers caused the water to cool, and waterfalls were so cold they started to freeze.

Besides the fluctuating water temps, there were cliffs, sand pits, rocky hillsides, tangles of tree roots, dense jungle foliage, then blank desert spots to cross. Sammi was jumping at every little sound, ready to gut any bastard that even thought to get close to her and her baby. Pruu was in a sort of woven wrap on her back and she made sure to bring some of the cloth up to cover her as they stepped out into another long stretch of desert. The ground was a dark brown, hard, and cracked earth. They were getting closer.

The heat was excruciating, and the sun was directly above them with no clouds to help protect them from it. She squinted her eyes at something in the distance, finally seeing something besides the wavy mirage lines. It looked like nothing more than a tiny dark line way in front of her, but her heart stopped. It had to be that erected stone pillar. She began to run to it.

Her lungs ached and the heat tired her out faster, but she refused to slow down or stop. She could hardly feel her feet as she raced towards him; it was as though she was flying. The ornate pillar grew closer and closer. She began to see the shape of Malo's body and she pushed herself faster. Lightheaded and blood rushing through her body with lightning speed, she reached him.

She began to cry instantly, unable to control herself. She was finally able to see how badly he was wounded—and it was worse than she thought. Warm tears streamed down her cheeks as her throat tightened and her lips trembled. His body was riddled with deep, oozing gashes. Several bones were broke and poked out through his skin.

Desperate for him to be alive, she tugged on his arm and shook him. Her vision was blurring, overrun with tears. She let out strangled sobs as he didn't react. He didn't lift his head. His chest wasn't moving. Malo's skin was burning hot to the touch and stiff like old leather.

It scared her to touch him, thinking that he might be dead, but she just had to get him down. With a shirt blade, she cut the cord holding both his legs, then one arm, and shoved at him her hardest to keep him upright. When she cut down his other arm, all of his weight fell on her. She held his body up, then as gently as possible dropping to her knees. She set him down on his back.

New streams of tears rolled down her face as she pried the bio mask from his face. She whimpered, staring at his still face and open, listless eyes. She could feel her heart dying inside if her, her chest feeling as though it was going to cave in. She brushed her hair behind her ear and rested her head on his chest to try and hear a heartbeat. When there was silence, she checked for a pulse, but still found nothing.

Chapter 18

She wouldn't let herself believe that he was dead. Sammi situated her legs under his head, propping him up some, and poured water into his mouth from the container she had brought along. She paused, then gave him more. She waited, then dumped the rest of the water down his throat. He still wasn't moving.

She bent over and hugged her arms around his wide chest. "Malo, please... please get up."

She shook and sobbed, a puddle of tears forming under her face. But when Pruu began to bounce and cry, she knew that she had to get her out of the heat. She forced herself to stand, feeling like gravity was suddenly a million times heavier. She wiped at her eyes, sniffled, then lifted her head to look for the closest oasis. There was a clump of green out in the distance to her left, so that was where she would go.

She wouldn't leave Malo. She hooked her hands under his arms and painstakingly began to drag him across the desert to the nearest tree cover. Being right for tall and muscular, he had to weigh almost 300lbs. Her former master had made her drag large kills behind her before, but never in such extreme heat and after she had exhausted herself running. Still, she wouldn't let herself stop to rest-she needed to get both him and Pruu out of the sun.

However, reaching the tree cover did not bring much relief. As soon as she flopped down under a cluster of huge leaves, the sound of an explosion hit her ears and all the blood drained from her body. Other yautjas were nearby and she couldn't protect both Malo and Pruu at the same time. She had to hide him. She jumped back up and, though her arms protested, she lifted up his shoulders.

Sammi drug him over to the base of a small cliff edge, where there was eroded earth and a rock overhang to conceal him. It was like a tiny cave, but she could almost stand all the way up in it, so it would have to do. She shoved his body all the way inside and then sat down next to him. Her former master had once said that yautjas were resistant to death. He had said that their metabolism will drop, heart rate will slow, breathing would become minimal, and that their body would enter a sort of coma.

If that was the case with her mate, that meant he was still alive. Sammi grabbed the medical kit and got to work. She wrapped up almost every inch of his body, as he had gagged gashes from someone's wrist blades on his arms, legs, torso-everywhere. A few strands of his banded dreads had been lopped off too, so she wrapped up the bloodied ends. His forearm, collarbone, one wrist, and bones in one foot were broken and she did her best to splint and bandage them.

She left him alone to go and find water, then returned. She propped his head up again, making him drink, but he still did not respond. When Pruu began to squirm, she held her in her arms and stroked her. Only feeding her calmed her down though. After that, there was nothing more to do but wait and see if Malo woke up.

She sat beside him, her fingers entwined with his, the minutes passing like hours. But finally, she felt his thumb twitch. Her heart fluttered, and she noticed that his chest was visibly moving as well. He was alive. Sammi started to cry again, the warm tears sliding down her face and dripping from her broad smile. She bent over him and gently pressed her lips to his mouth over and over until his eyes opened.

"I'm so glad you're alive." she choked, her throat tight and her heart racing.

Sammi stared down into his white eyes, relief flooding through her. He was still for a minute, his mandibles moving slightly. His eyes looked up at Sammi, then moved to look at Pruu, then finally to the entrance of the cave. She did not anticipate his reaction. Malo's chest pulsed with a booming growl and then he harshly shoved Sammi, causing her to land on her back.

Pruu began to mumble and wiggle, and Sammi blinked in confusion as she sat up. Malo shakily propped himself up with his good arm, his eyes boring into hers angrily. He looked himself over, not looking the least bit pleased to be bandaged.

His voice was dark and monotone, "You should but be here. Leave."

"I had to come-you would have died."

"Leave, right now!" He growled.

"I can't, we were shot at and the ship was destroyed."

He came unglued, and a fierce roar ripped through his chest. Sammi turned away, holding one hand to her ear as the pressure became painful. The volume didn't seem to hurt Pruu the way it did Sammi, but she began to cry some anyway. When he stopped, her ears were ringing. Malo's chest was heaving violently as he stared at her.

"I would have died with honor, fighting for my clan. You should not have intervened! At least a piece of me would have lived on in Pruu, but you have sacrificed yourself and my child. Oomans are worthless mates! No wonder they are always pets and slaves!"

Sammi just stared at him, feeling like the cave walls were spinning. Pressure built behind her eyes but she held back tears. Pruu began to cry harder, so she rocked her. Malo's mandibles were slowly splaying out like he was about to roar or yell at her again. Sammi whispered to the baby soothingly and stroked her, but nothing worked. She did feel worthless.

"Hand her to me!" Malo hissed.

She bent to give Pruu over, and Malo snatched the tiny child from her hands. Pruu began to quiet even before he started to purr. Securely nestled in his arms, the child began to fall asleep. He was gentle with Pruu-making soft chattering noises, purring, and lightly stroking her. When he looked up at Sammi however, his eyes were vengeful and full of hatred.

When she couldn't stand it anymore, Sammi scrambled out of the cave and ran. Far enough away that she knew he couldn't hear, Sammi broke down. She hugged her arms around a small tree and let the tears pour from her eyes unhindered. She shook and sobbed as she clung the tree, feeling the weight of the world crashing down on her. She'd brought an infant into a war zone and now they had no way to get back home-Malo hated her, and he was right, she was a terrible mate.

Chapter 19

When the tears had ceased, Sammi drew in an unsteady breath. Her former master had said that she was always meant to temporary, and now Malo had said that human mates were worthless. Malo had never been so cruel. She felt lost, felt weak. Her baby was going to die and it would be all her fault.

A noise in the jungle had her swiveling, her heart jumping into overdrive. Alone, she suddenly felt afraid. Her eyes scanned the trees and brush but found nothing. Still, her body was tense and she began to back away. She wanted to hide.

That was how she always was on earth-afraid, weak, worthless. Her former master was an asshole but he had made her stronger, made her fearless. She wouldn't lose that now when she needed it most. Her hands balled into tight fists. Her mate needed her whether he was going to admit it or not.

She was not worthless, Sammi knew how to set a million different types of hunting traps. She set snares along the ground there there were small game trails. Made deadfall traps by cliff edges and near animal holes. She crafted several leghold traps under trees and bushes. Malo needed food, water, and medical care-and she could provide that.

Instead of going back to the cave to wait for one of the traps to be triggered, she climbed a tree instead. She wanted Malo to worry about her, and she wanted to get a better view of the land. Her ship was destroyed, but she wasn't against stealing someone else's ship. There were no ships and no shimmer of a cloaking device, but she did find a few areas to avoid. There was smoke coming from a different isolated oasis, then in the desert there were blue flashes of a plasma cannon.

She caught a small, strange, hairless animal in one of the traps and dressed it quickly. All of it was going to Malo, so she didn't even bother to cook it. Though his immune system might not be at to notch at the moment, he had shots and vaccines before he left and wouldn't get any parasites from it. With food in tow, she headed back to the cave. She was almost worried to have left Malo alone to care for Pruu, but found that they were fine.

Malo was on his side with Pruu in his arm, his head bowed and his eyes looking down at her with admiration. Hearing Sammi approach, he grunted and strained to sit upright. He wouldn't meet her eyes. She walked right up to him, and slapped her palm across his face as hard as she could, the sound loudly echoing against the walls. His head didn't budge from the impact, but his jaw dropped.

Now that she had his full attention, she pointed her finger at his face and began to scold him, "Don't you dare, ever, EVER talk to me like that again! I am your mate and I have every right, just as much as you, to make hard decisions... If you died and I couldn't take care of myself, then I could end up a servant again and Pruu could become an orphan... Goddamnit, I love you and Pruu needs you-that was worth the risk."

He wore a guilty sort of expression, with his head tilted down but his eyes looking up at her. She hoped that he listened and never spoke to her like that again just for the sake of her hand. She was bound to break her hand on his head if she slapped him again. Her whole hand ached and the digits felt tingly. She flexed her fingers to try and regain some feeling in them. He was silent as expected, knowing that yautjas weren't big on apologies.

She held up the clean, cut, strips of uncooked meat from her kill, "Eat this."

He only had one good hand. The tendons and bones of one wrist were badly damaged, probably from a wrist blade but then made worse by having it tied to the pillar. So Sammi had to hold Pruu as he ate, but then immediately afterwards he reached out to have her back. Pruu squirmed at first, but as soon as she grasped one of Malo's fingers her eyes lit up and she bounced her feet happily. Malo lifted her up to his face, nuzzling his mandibles on the side of her head.

Sammi watched him interact with Pruu, and knew that she just had to make him live through this, no matter what it took. The sky was darkening and Malo would need sleep, so a soft bedding under him couldn't hurt. He needed a fire to keep him warm as well. Before she could sleep, she needed to collect more water, and check the traps. Sammi turned to leave again, but heard a soft grunt from Malo.

When she turned to face him, he huffed, "Come mere." She shuffled forward but he added, "Kneel."

Sammi folded her legs under her, "What do you want?"

She wasn't sure what to expect from him as he set Pruu down in his lap, but she was happily surprised. Malo reached out to slide his palm across Sammi's cheek until his fingers curled into her hair. Then, he gently reeled her in for a kiss. Her lips melted against his mandibles, and she reveled in the way his mouth moved over hers. Sammi's eyes slid closed—that was a good enough apology for her.

When they broke apart, and her eyes fluttered open, Sammi's chest ached. She wished that he had never left, wished that he wasn't hurt, and that they were back home alone together... She would make it happen. Sammi collected wood and built a fire. Then, she compiled soft leaves and grass to make a bed for him and little Pruu.

It seemed that they wouldn't have to seek out and steal an enemy spaceship to get back home. Malo said that there was a protected clan base with supplies and ships that could help them. They wouldn't send out any rescue, as it would be too risky for the clan, so it was up to Sammi and Malo to get there on their own. However, a huge expanse of empty desert separated them from the base. Seeing how Malo was weak, and some bones in his foot were broken, it was not going to be easy.

Chapter 20

They stocked up on water and food throughout the days. She smoked the meat to preserve it, and stored the water in the empty stomachs of the kills. When Malo wasn't sleeping, he watched over Pruu and Sammi went hunting. There were animals like tiger-striped wolves, fat eels with spider-legs, fuzzy frog-like creatures, and an abundance of animals similar to armadillos. This time though, she wasn't hunting any of those.

She was covered in mud to diffuse her scent and the black netting rendered her invisible. Sammi was crouched down in a bush, her blade poised in her hand and ready to strike. She watched the yautja move with stealth, his head scanning the surroundings. He didn't have his bio mask, probably having damaged or lost it in a fight. He couldn't see Sammi's body heat, couldn't smell her, and so she had the advantage of surprise.

Malo had been stripped of his weapons and his other gear when enemies had strung him up on that stone pillar. She hoped to steal this yautjas homeostasis netting so that they could cross the desert easier. She was silent as she stalked him. Her heart was beginning to beat faster, her muscles tensing with readiness. When the yautja glanced down at his wrist controls, she had her opportunity.

Sammi launched herself from the bushes, aiming for one of his legs to immobilize him. He turned just in time for her sword to miss, so she took him down a different way. She was quick, agile, and before he could attack her, Sammi jumped up and grabbed ahold of the strands of his hair. He let out a strangled roar of pain as he fell to his knees, and she shoved his back against the ground. She was too small in comparison to successfully pin him down on her own, so she poised the sword at his throat.

Angry red eyes, thickly rimmed in black, locked onto hers as she felt the alien's chest vibrate with a threatening growl. She had never killed a yautja, and she had almost come to accept them as her own species in a way after she had met Malo. Still, they were at war and she needed the netting. Sammi was about to saw at his neck and spill his blood onto the ground, when her eyes spotted the metal bead in his hair. Etched in the bead was a clan symbol, her clan symbol.

Sammi jerked the blade off his neck. The yautja reacted with rage, throwing Sammi off him like a rag doll. She rolled in the mud then lifted her head to see him advance on her with wrist blades drawn. She tried to scramble to her feet to defend herself, but she wasn't fast enough. Serrated metal blades came at her.

"Allies!" She cried out. The blades halted. She lifted her eyes up to the yautja, who had his head tilted down at her now. "We are allies. Same clan."

She didn't have a brand in her skin that marked her clan, nor the Koros beads in the hair with the clan symbol. She was wearing her armour though and wielding her weapons, each of which had the clan symbol etched into it somewhere. His eyes danced around her body, seeking out her clan affiliation. His wrist blades were drawn away. Finding that she was indeed from the same clan, he turned to leave.

Sammi jumped to her feet, "I need your help." He didn't look back at her so she followed beside him, "Please, I need any food, water, weapons, gear, or medical equipment you can spare. Do you have a ship?"

"Go away ooman. You are clan member, but not yautja."

"Please, I need your help. My mate is wounded and I have an infant with me."

His steps slowed, "A pup?" She waited for him to say something else, to offer help, but he started to leave again.

"Please!" She begged.

"No." He growled.

Her hands balled into fists, but she spun around and headed the opposite direction.

Running into that yautja hadn't been pleasant, but the next one she encountered was much worse. As soon as Malo was able to stand and move with the help of a walking stick, they left the tiny cave in the direction of the clan base. She made shelters where they camped, hunted, collected water, and took care of Pruu. In the desert areas, Sammi and Malo switched on and off who wore the homeostasis netting. Malo still slept a lot, needing rest for healing, and so that left Sammi with some free time.

She planned to keep moving as soon as he woke up, but in the meantime she carried Pruu with her to a nearby stream. The water was shallow, yet quickly moving, making it nicely cool. Sammi scanned the area for large carnivores, poisonous plants, and other dangers. Once she deemed that it was safe, she lifted Pruu out of the woven wrap that held her to Sammi's back. Pruu fussed at first, but as soon as her little toes touched the water she lit up.

This whole horrid trip was nothing but a vacation for Pruu so far. Sammi crouched in the water and watched Pruu splash, trill, and make sounds close to laughter. Even so young, yautjas were more immune to the heat. Pruu wasn't attacked by bugs like Sammi was. And she was getting so much attention, always being held.

Still, Sammi knew that it was never playtime and as soon as she heard any little sound from the jungle, she picked up Pruu, ready to run. She held the baby to her chest, listening intently, and eyes scanning the forest. She didn't hear anything else-but that was a problem as well. Even insects and birds seemed to be afraid of yautjas and once one was near, they became quiet. In the distance, there was a flash of yellow eyes.

She was being hunted. Sammi clambered up the side of the creek and ran as fast as she could, but with Pruu in her arms it wasn't fast enough. One leg collapsed under, sharp pain jolting through her. She quickly twisted to yank the barbed metal spike out of her thigh then continued running. The hunter behind her still used the speargun; she could hear the spikes burying into tree trunks beside her.

She snaked around cliff edges and creek beds, crashing through brush. She lept over tangles of tree roots and forced her legs to carry her as fast as they possibly could. Her lungs were raw and her head was dizzy by the time she had outrun him, but she no longer heard him behind her at all. Knowing that a yautja would not give up that easy, and that her stamina food not match his, she decided to hide. There was a huge fallen tree on one side of a creek, with a dense tangle of roots uplifted.

Sammi jumped down into the water and crouched to squeeze below the hanging roots where she would be hidden. She stroked Pruu gently, trying to keep her quiet as she nervously stared down at the water rushing over her feet. The yautja appeared at the top of the creek a few minutes later, its expressionless metal mask scanning, searching. He held a maul in one hand like Thor himself, and wore what looked to be a turtle plastron strung with other small bones to make necklace. All she could hear was her own rapid heart beat in her ears as he turned to stare right at her.

His gaze continued though, not stopping to stare. If he had his vision function on infrared, he would have spotted her. Sammi waited until he turned and marched away to let out her breath. She was sure that he was not from her clan-she would have remembered a yautja like him stomping around with a giant hammer in his fist. She'd never seen a yautja wield one before, but it was a blunt-force weapon, and a yautja would likely use it as flyswatter-flattening enemies heads like they were eggshells.

The danger wasn't over though, as Pruu suddenly began to cry. Sammi quickly covered the baby's mouth, which muffled the sound, but made her cry out louder. Yautjas had exceptional hearing. Sammi held Pruu tighter, beginning to hyperventilate, afraid to run but afraid to stay put. She begged that he was far enough away that he didn't hear her. But as soon as that predatory clicking hit her ears, she knew she was doomed.

Chapter 21

She held Pruu tightly cradled in her arms, knowing that the yautja was close, but unsure of exactly where. If she bolted and ran right into him, there would be no chance of escape. An airy clicking tumbled through the air again, making the hairs on her arms stand on end. She took slow, deep breaths, trying to convince herself it was going to be ok. All she needed to do was get out of the creek, hide Pruu, and face the alien with weapons drawn.

She didn't even get that far. The yautja jumped down into the shallow water with a splash, and Sammi quickly ran for the bank. She dug in her feet and one hand reached the top edge of the bank to lift herself out, but out of the corner of her eye she saw the maul lift into the air. She jumped out of the way, stumbling, and landed on her back. Sammi lifted her head to watch the black metal hammer crash into the edge of the bank, crumbling it.

A blow like that would have likely broken her back. A yautja would never, under any circumstances, intentionally kill a yautja child. However, during times of war, it would not damage their honour to kill the mother even knowing that the child would die as a result. They would not show restraint simply because she carried a pup in her arms.

The yautja swung the maul at her again, managing to move it fast enough that it make a swoop noise in the air, and the hammer had to weigh more than she did. She scrambled out of the way and got to her feet. But as soon as she did, the maul connected with one of her legs, sweeping her off her feet. Her face hit the rocks under the water and it was all she could do to hold Pruu up, away from the water and rocks. Sammi drew out her sword as she lifted herself up, only for the yautja to smash the hammer into her fist.

When the sword dropped, he forced the hammer down on top of it, mangling her weapon and making it useless to wield. Before she could grab a different weapon, his boot connected with her chest, sending her crashing backwards and Pruu slipped from her arm. She watched her baby roll away from her. The child began to wail, louder than she'd ever heard before as she squirmed on her back in the shallow water.

Once Pruu started to cough, Sammi was terrified that she'd drown. She launched over to her, trying to reach her in time, but the yautja grabbed her by the throat. Sammi kicked and thrashed at him, desperately trying to free herself so that she could get Pruu out of the water. This yautja was stronger than the rest, short and stocky, with bulging muscles. She grabbed the dagger from her hip and plunged it into his chest, yet all he did was growl.

With his fingers closing around her throat, he effortlessly lifted her into the air. She let go of the handle of the dagger to hold onto his arm, preventing her neck from breaking. But that seemed only to make her suffer a longer death. She couldn't breathe, couldn't swallow. The pressure in her chest was beyond painful as her lungs were starved of all oxygen. At first, she was seeing stars but then everything started to dim and fade to black.

She was dropped suddenly, and even though her face was in the water, her first reaction was to inhale. She sucked up water, causing her lungs to burn yet she was too drowsy to stand up and expel the water. She could have just closed her eyes and slept, yet she could still hear

her baby coughing. Sammi scrambled upright, but her body forced her to bend at her middle and throw up water from her lungs and her stomach. Then she scrambled over to Pruu, deftly snatching her from the water and bent her over her thigh to make sure she hadn't inhaled any.

She sat sideways in the water with Pruu in her arms, her head spinning. She took in ragged breaths, trying to regain some strength. When she finally shoved her sopping wet hair out of the way and lifted her head, she realized what had distracted the yautja with the hammer. She could hardly believe what she was seeing at first, but Malo charged at the enemy like a raging bull. He pounded his fists into him with the wrath of an angry god.

Then, he lifted the male up into the air and slammed his body down onto his knee. The other yautjas spine let out a sickening crack as it broke. Malo shoved the body away from him carelessly, then turned to look back at the creek. His adrenaline was fading fast. He seemed to look at each Pruu and Sammi to make sure they were safe and then his eyes glazed over and he collapsed into a lifeless heap on the ground.

Sammi struggled from the water, and knelt beside him. His breathing and heart rate was slow, but at least she could tell it was there. It had taken all his strength to fight like that, but he had come to her rescue. Sammi placed a small kiss on his forehead, her hands shaking, then had to re-stitch every gory wound, align his twisted, broken foot, and bandage him up again. She held back tears; he was going to be ok.

When the sun began to drop and he still hadn't regained consciousness, Sammi constructed a sleigh from branches, and long braided grass for rope. She rolled Malo onto it, and covered him with leaves for some shade. He had told her the location of the base. Walking, it would take them a few excruciating weeks to reach it-and a human could go only three days without water. She drug Malo through the jungle to the very edge of the desert. It was as vast as an ocean, stretching on as far as her eyes could see, with heat waves dancing off the surface.

Sammi fed Pruu, filled all the water containers, and drank from the creek until she was sick. Then when the sun fell below the horizon, she drug the sleigh out onto the cracked desert earth. She didn't get very far before she had company. A pack of four tiger-striped wolves was trailing close behind her. Though they were big, they acted more like scavengers, like hyenas.

Though she was tired, she knew that she couldn't stop. They were steadily getting closer, lured by the smell of blood on her and Malo. They were hungry, and sought to steal her preserved meat or even take a chunk out of Malo while he was vulnerable. In the dark, she fired a plasma bolt at the group to try and scare them off. The explosion caused them to scatter away from the burst of blue light, but they returned.

She heard one of their jaws close on the sleigh Malo was resting on, its sharp teeth scraping across the wood before she swung at it. It was agile as it bounced away, then turned back to try again. They were closing in on her. Sammi covered Malo's body with her own, unwilling to let him go, and with heaving breaths she tased any wolf that dared come near. She stayed awake the whole night keeping the stripped wolves at a distance. When the sky began to lighten, the pack abandoned her to go back to the oasis before the ground began to cook. Sammi twisted the rope around her wrists and began to pull the sleigh farther into the desert.

Chapter 22

Malo woke up later the next day. Sammi perked up when she heard the sleigh creaking and turned to see him stirring. His eyelids slowly opened and then he let out a purr as his white eyes locked onto Pruu. She was sitting on his broad chest, playing with a woven twig and grass ball with some animal teeth that rattled around inside. Sammi had made it for her as the toy kept her busy, and Pruu was more content when she was close to Malo.

It wasn't long before he was walking again, though he required two sticks he used like crutches. They walked side by side, but Sammi still drug the sleigh behind her for Pruu to sleep on and in case Malo needed it again. The food was divided up in equal rations. The great thing about the strange alien water was that when you shook the containers and agitated the water enough, frost formed on the outside. Cold water was absolute bliss in the heat of the desert.

Enemies had taken his weapons and gear when they strung him up on the pillar, so they had to switch on and off who wore the black homeostasis netting. Once Malo was able to, they switched on and off on who carried Pruu or drug the sleigh. Though the desert looked vast and empty, at night there were strange predators. Malo and Sammi took turns taking watch at night.

After a week though, Sammi was slowing down. Malo made her leave the sleigh, as it was becoming to much of a burden. He took off her armor and most of her weapons too, and discarded them. They were only hindering her now. He started refusing to wear her netting.

He wouldn't let her stay up for night shifts either. When Malo began to refuse food and water as well, saving all of it for Sammi, she fought him on that. However, he was right. Yautjas didn't need food but every few days, while she was used to three meals a day. Her body required more water, while his body was more water efficient. And she wasn't just feeding herself-she had Pruu to provide for as well.

The food depleted quickly, any they still had a ways to go. When breastfeeding Pruu, her milk didn't last as long as it used to. Pruu began to cry constantly; she was hungry. Sammi collapsed to her knees, breathing heavily even though they were going at a slow pace. She shut her eyes and just sat there.

Malo gave her proper time to rest, but then said, "Get up."

Sammi didn't move. Everything hurt. They had to reach the base in time before they ran out of water, which meant they only slept a few hours and took no breaks unless absolutely necessary. But with Malo still on crutches, they couldn't go very fast. She was starving; the baby was starving. Nothing but barren ground surrounded them.

"Get up!" Malo commanded. She didn't want to, didn't want to move at all. He smacked the end of his walking stick across her face, "I said get up!"

Her knees ached and every muscle protested as she stood to her feet. Malo pressed close behind her, nuzzling her neck for a second before he nudged her forward. Malo began to

always carry Pruu on his back in the woven cloth wrap, not taking turns. They had one small container of water left, and a few days walk until they reached the base. They all could have made it.

However, the medical kit she carried for Malo had only the basics. It contained no antibiotics, and even in such a dry environment, his wounds got infected. Yautjas usually hid their pain from others, so it was not unusual that Malo insisted on checking on his wounds and bandaging himself. It didn't surprise her that, though he was on crutches, he had to walk beside her or in front of her-never behind. She knew he had to be in pain, but didn't know the extent until one morning.

Even though she was exhausted, it was difficult to sleep on the crusty dry earth, and the sun was glowing brightly behind her lids. She didn't want to move, but knew that if she didn't Malo would wake her up or Pruu would start crying for her breakfast. She blinked open her eyes to find that she was right-Malo was awake and watching her. That meant that it was time to get going. Sammi laidd there a minute more, then finally summoned the strength to get to her feet.

Her hair was a rats nest, her teeth felt furry, and she'd been wearing the same clothes for weeks. Still, she managed a half-smile and mumbled, "Good morning."

Malo just stared up at her, which wasn't at all unusual for him, but he didn't make a move to get up. Assuming that she had a minute before they began to walk, she softly woke up Pruu and fed her. She stretched, and tried to swallow down her own saliva to keep her mouth from drying out.

He still did not get up.

She just knew something had to be wrong then, "...Malo?"

He averted his eyes and calmly said, "I cannot stand."

Her heart fell a little, but he had always had trouble getting upright with the crutches, and yautjas didn't like to ask for assistance. She brushed a strand of hair behind her ear, "I can help."

Before she could touch him he said, "Sammi, I can't walk."

He was so calm, but it was scaring her, "We can rest a little longer."

He met her eyes again, his voice monotone, "I can't feel my leg, can't move it."

Pressure built behind her eyes, but her body had no water to spare for tears, "No."

As Malo began to undo the bandages, she set Pruu down on the soft cloth wrap, then dropped to her knees in front of him to watch. She quickly realized why he had bandaged not only his broken foot, but up his leg as well. Dark bulging veins were crawling up his leg, carrying the infection farther. That was not good. When he unwrapped his foot, she gagged, and would have thrown up if her stomach hadn't been empty.

His foot was swollen like a balloon, bulging from the confines of his sandal. He took the shoe off and unbandaged the foot the rest of the way, showing the open wound on the top which was oozing, and his broken toes. His hand lifted then to show her his broken

collarbone. Under the wrappings, it was infected as well, probably down to the bone. It was so close to his head, and to his heart, if the infection spread...

"You knew." She accused him, "You knew about the infection... You knew you wouldn't make it. Why didn't you tell me?"

She wrapped her arms around his waist like a child and pressed her face against his stomach. She knew that he didn't tell her because there was nothing she could have done. And she was too weak now to drag him the rest of the way. Sammi drew in ragged, shallow breaths, as she trembled. She wouldn't let him go, wouldn't leave him in the desert to die alone.

His chest pulsed with deep, lulling purrs to try and calm her, and then he said, "I need you to listen to me." His hand slipped under her chin to her to sit up and look at him, "You will walk away until you cannot make out how many fingers I hold up. No matter what you hear, you will wait ten minutes before walking back to me. Do you understand?"

He sounded so serious, it made Sammi worry, "What are you going to do?"

He was silent.

"No! You can't! I won't leave you." Her arms tightened around his waist. Yautjas weren't opposed to suicide once they knew that they were defeated.

"Do as I said." He commanded.

"Fuck you!" She cried.

He let out a soft trill as he touched her cheek, then spoke calmly, "Do as I said, and leave your dagger."

Chapter 23

Even as Pruu began to cry, she wouldn't let him go, wouldn't leave him even for a second. He purred, and she could feel the vibrations down to her bones, but it did not make her feel any better. She'd come all this way. She'd fought her hardest. It wasn't fair.

Once she had calmed some, Malo spoke softly, "I will be alive when you walk back, but I have no guarantees after that."

That meant he wasn't considering suicide. She lifted her head, "What do you mean? What are you going to do?"

His mandibles clicked together for a moment before he said, "The leg is swollen, so draining it should relieve some pain."

"I can help."

"No. Now do as I said... and take Pruu with you."

Sammi lifted the tiny baby up, trying not to take notice that she'd lost weight. She handed over her dagger to Malo as he had requested, and then began to walk away. Everything in her said that she shouldn't leave him, but he had never lied to her before. She tried not to worry. She trusted him. So she walked, looking back at him for distance, until he was nothing but a dark blob in the middle of the rising heat waves.

That's when the noises began. She knew exactly what the sounds were, and they terrified her, made her heart stop, and her blood run cold. Though the were faint at the distance she was at, Malo's snarls, howls, and anguished roars found their way to her ears. She stood there, petrified, eyes wide and staring at him. Though she couldn't see what he was doing, she knew that he was in extreme pain.

She tried to do what he'd instructed, tried to count, but she couldn't keep track. Sammi let her legs fold under her, her head getting dizzy. The noises eventually ceased, but she waited a little while longer to walk back at him. She knew that he didn't want her seeing him so wounded and in pain. Honestly, she didn't want to see it either-just thinking about him in so much pain made her stomach nauseous.

When she reached him, she tried not to look at him, and waited for him to tell her to go on without him. Instead, he asked, "Let me hold her."

Every time Malo spoke Pruu turned towards the sound of his voice. Sammi passed Pruu into his arms, watching the way she got so excited to see him. Her tiny mandibles formed the closest thing to a smile she could, and she wiggled happily in his arms. Sammi's eyes ventured down to his foot, and she held her breath, afraid of what she'd see. However, Malo already had it bandaged up, as well as his good leg, and the other wounds as well. Bright green blood was pooled under him, but he had cleaned the dagger of it.

"Why did you bandage your other leg?"

"Small flesh wound." He grunted, brushing her off.

Something in his tone had her suspicious. "I don't remember seeing a wound on that leg." she pressed.

"Dagger slipped."

"Just a few minutes ago, you accidentally cut your good leg and bandaged up your entire calf because of it?" She hadn't seen him move either of his legs since she got back.

He let out a snort, which meant that he did not like her questions.

She dropped the subject, feeling both mentally and physically exhausted, and knowing that she was avoiding a more prominent conversation. Sammi slowly let her eyes fall to the ground, her chest aching. If Malo couldn't walk, and she couldn't drag him, that meant that she would be continuing on without him. Yautjas had an incredible immune system capable of eventually fighting off the nastiest of infections. However, there wasn't enough water left for her to stay and wait for him to get better.

Malo said what she was already thinking, "You and Pruu can reach the base. It is only a four day walk at most." Then he surprised her, producing a strange wrapped up package and handing it to her, "Do not open this unless you are very near to starving to death."

"Is this food? Where were you hiding this?"

"It is very important that you don't open it unless you absolutely have to."

She nodded solemnly.

Sammi hadn't eaten in days, but she was determined to reach that clan base with or without any more food. Once there, she could get a ship and go back for Malo. There was no doubt in her mind that he would still be alive; she knew he was strong. Sammi lowered down to him, tracing her fingers over the light pink colouring around Pruu's mottled reptilian spots. She gently lifted the child away, but then set her down on the soft cloth wrap-she wouldn't leave Malo without a goodbye.

She slid her hands into his thick hair, and leaned her face closer to his. His ice white eyes were staring into her, and she suddenly felt a flutter of nervousness... as though they were just falling in love again, as though all the feelings were new. She shut her eyes, and her nose brushed the side of his face as she closed the gap. As her lips touched, his musk invigorated her senses and made her feel weightless. She moved her lips tentatively at first, relearning how his tusk-tipped mandibles felt and tasted.

His mandibles were stiff at first, not at all like palpable human lips, but they were smooth and the way they moved had her body melting against his. All four of his mandibles swept across her mouth, parting her lips some. He had grown much better at the human type of kissing since they had first met. His hot, thin tongue slipped between her lips for a second then disappeared. It left her with the slightest taste of spice, and left her wanting.

Sammi applied a bit more pressure, her mouth moving more desperately. He matched her passion and roughly pulled her chest flush against his. His skin was warm and she felt safe in his arms. Sammi moaned into his kiss as his tongue slipped into her mouth and he returned the gesture with a lusty purr. In the end, she was breathless.

Sammi let her arms hang around his neck for a moment as her heartbeats slowed, and then she forced herself away. She scooped up Pruu, grabbed her dagger, the last container of water, and that package. She had to be strong, for Pruu. If she didn't have the child with her, Sammi would have stayed beside him. It took every ounce of willpower she had to walk away from him.

Chapter 24

She hated the feeling that that would be the last kiss they ever shared. Sammi just knew that something wasn't right with him, that he knew something she didn't. Maybe he planned on committing suicide once she was gone. Maybe he simply knew that the infection would kill him before she could get back to him. She prayed that she was just worrying for nothing.

She kept her legs moving at a steady pace, keeping track of the sun for direction. Her head felt like it was going to split in half from the headaches plaguing her. Rapid heartbeats and breathing were a sign of exhaustion as well as dehydration. She stopped for a minute to rest and use the bathroom. Though she felt pressure like she had to go, she didn't pass anything besides a few drops of dark yellow pee.

She had to drink, because another side effect of dehydration was confusion. If she lost track of her direction and speed, in the bareness of the desert she'd never be able to find it again. Her wrist controls had been with her other gear Malo insisted she leave behind, otherwise maintaining strict direction wouldn't have been an issue. And she had to drink the water for Pruu as well. If her milk went dry, the baby would not make it.

Sammi shook the container for a second, the foreign properties of the alien water somehow making it colder when agitated. Then, she untied the sinew holding the top of the animal stomach closed, and carefully tipped it to her lips. She felt like she'd never had water in her entire life. The cool feel of it as it rushed over her tongue, and slid down her throat was unbelievably refreshing.

It was invigorating... It was hard to stop drinking.

There wasn't much left anyway, but she had to ration herself. However, she couldn't force her hand to take the container away from her lips. Her body needed more water. Her body craved and yearned for just a little more. It wasn't enough. She couldn't fight it, and kept swallowing until her stomach was full and the water was gone.

Sammi carelessly dropped the container to the ground, ashamed of her lack of control, and dreading what she'd just done. She stared down at the empty, mustard-colored animal stomach. It was technically edible, and she was getting to the point where she would eat absolutely anything. She picked it up off the ground, dusted it off, and then began to gnaw on it like she was some wild animal. It was shareful. The pieces scrapped down her throat, and she swallowed the stringy sinew as well.

It was the most disgusting thing she'd ever put in her mouth, and it probably didn't carry any nutritional value anyway. Sammi continued walking even as it got dark. There were snake-like creatures that lived in holes in the desert, and they only came out at night. Without Malo to watch at night, she felt that she couldn't let herself sleep. The snakes were nothing like her fuzzy, friendly worms at home she used to feed.

These blotched snakes leaned in to the sound of Pruu's cries as though they knew she was small and vulnerable. Even with her joints aching, her eyes sunken in and exhausted, she

could not stop to rest on the ground or sleep. Though having Pruu with her complicated everything, she was what kept her going. Without Pruu, she would have been alone in the pitch black desert at night. Without Pruu, she would have stayed with Malo, and likely died with him.

She could not give up and let her baby die; Pruu was her will to go on. She was so close to the protected clan base by what she estimated, yet when she tried to feed Pruu, nothing came. Her milk had stopped. Sammi reached for that package Malo had given her, hoping that it would save them. Pruu still cried, but did not wail like she used to. Pruu's strength was fading.

She didn't care what was in the wrappings, she and Pruu were starving. She would eat her own toes if she had to, but what she found in the package was far worse. Her hands trembled as she stared down at it, her mind in disbelief. Covered in dry fluorescent blood, like green paint, was a chunk of solid meat. She flipped it over to study the other side, her eyes finding grey-tinged reptilian skin.

It was a part of Malo's leg, his calf muscle. He had cut it off so that she would have something to eat. She was horrified. She was disgusted. But, she was starving.

She knew that she had to eat it, or his pain would have been for nothing, Pruu would starve, she would die, and no one would go back for Malo. Still, it took her several minutes just to look at it again, and after she ate it she had to try her hardest not to throw it back up. Even though it was for her own survival, she felt so ashamed. After doing something like that, she felt like she'd never be the same again. She did her best to bury her thoughts and the memory.

She finally reached the spot where she should have been able to see the clan base in the distance. Her soul should have been singing with joy, yet there was nothing but barren desert as far as her eyes could see. There were no oasis, no base, nothing. With the absence of visual landmarks, humans naturally tended to walk in circles. If she hadn't walked in a perfect straight line, there was no telling how far off she was.

She had no more will to go on. She slumped on the ground, her body aching. When she heard that iconic predatory clicking, she thought maybe she was dying and her head was making up sounds that weren't there. However, blue waves of electricity sparked all around her. She had never been so happy to see fully armoured, towering, reptilian aliens pointing their weapons at her.

Chapter 25

She laid there on the ground, feeling like it took forever before someone grabbed her and hauled her upright. Her mind numbly registered that another yautja grabbed Pruu from the cloth wrap, and then she was lifted up into the air and carried. Sammi let her body go slack in the strangers arms, too tired to keep her head upright. She could hardly fight to keep her eyes open, but watched as a door crackled with blue electricity before they walked inside. The base had been cloaked; she had made it after all.

She was manhandled from machine to machine, but ultimately healed. She was thinner than before, but healthy. She didn't see Pruu at all, but she trusted that they were caring for her too. As soon as she was able, she would get a ship and go retrieve Malo. However, one last injection they gave her had her eyes feeling floaty and her mind clouding. She fought to stay alert, but the drug was strong.

She panicked to get someone's attention before she fell asleep, "Please, my mate is still out there, alive! Someone has to go get him! Please!"

Her head was swirling as a few yautjas began to banter about protocol. They questioned her identity, their safety, to her mates motives as though he could be some sort of spy. Sammi kept blinking, fighting to remain seated upright on the medical table. Some argued that it was best to leave him, others argued to go rescue him. She was afraid that no one would help.

She was losing her grip on consciousness, but finally one male leaned down to her and said, "I will retrieve him. Fuck the consequences." With that, she let the fog take her.

Sammi rocketed awake, not knowing how much time had passed or if Malo was alive. Sitting up so abruptly, she got a head rush, but tried to focus. Her eyes locked onto a yautja near the door, who was halfway out of his seat with his hands on his weapons. His body was tense, his yellow eyes were glued on her, and his mandibles were starting to flare. She'd likely startled him, as he seemed ready to chop some heads off.

Still frozen in place, he cautiously asked, "Are you unwell?"

"Where's Malo? Pruu, is she ok?"

He relaxed some, "Next room. They are both alive and healthy."

Sammi headed out the door and zipped into the neighboring room. Her knees felt weak and she just about passed out at again seeing Malo alive and looking his best. He was sitting on the bed with Pruu in his arms. His wounds were healed, and she tried to peek at his leg without staring. However, there was nothing to see. They had completely regenerated his calf.

She wanted to run into his arms-but she held herself back. Malo had always commented on her high emotions, and she figured that he did not want her to be dramatic. She could see that he was alive and well, and a yautja female would be content with just that. She did not need to wrap her arms around him and hear his strong beating heart in his chest. So she stood in the doorway, wondering if he would still be angry at her for endangering Pruu.

Malo was still tender towards her though, “I went to see you but you were still asleep, and then this little thing,” he bounced Pruu lightly in his arms, “began to cry. They did not inform me that you’d woken up yet.”

She had not even thought about how Malo seemed to have gone to see the baby before seeing her, she was just glad he was alive. But, it was comforting to know that he had checked up on her. She tried to think of something to say that was between super gushy and stone-cold uncaring. Really, all she could think about was her last meal. To think of what it took to cut off a portion of his own leg... She couldn’t get it out of her mind.

Malo was watching her, waiting for a response as she grew increasingly nervous. Needing to clear her head, she turned and ran the other way. She passed several other yautjas, and at every corner someone was staring at her-as though they knew what she’d done. She found a small cramped room like a closet, and she hid inside. She sat on the floor and concentrated on breathing.

Of course, Malo promptly found her, and it wasn’t like him to knock. When he found that she’d locked the door, he began to pry the metal off its hinges. She listened to the door creak, and watched lines of light appear at the edges. He wasn’t going to give up. Sammi had to jump up and unlock the door before he tore it off.

He opened the door and looked down at her calmly then, “Are you ok?”

She shook her head.

The stress of it all was suddenly bearing down on her, even if it was all over and done with now. Malo was silent; of course, he didn’t understand or know how to deal with her emotions. Honestly, neither did she. She just wanted don’t time alone. However, Malo did not seem willing to leave her by herself.

After a minute, he said, “Come, we will mate.”

She was sure he had the best intentions, but she crossed her arms, “I’m not in the mood.”

“But I want you.”

She only half-smiled, but then asked, “Can we just go home now?”

“Many clan and enemy ships are being attacked. It isn’t safe to leave yet.”

She nodded but stood to her feet. Sammi didn’t know what she wanted to do. She didn’t feel hungry, or tired. She definitely didn’t want to go back outside. Her eyes began to troll the walls of the hallway, just staring at their ornate design. Malo pursued his earlier suggestion, and a predatory clicking rolled into a hungry grumble.

“Don’t you start that.” She warned, even as he began to crouch and inch towards her. She quickly tried to distract him, “Why don’t you go get in one of those machines and erase some scars? You’re starting to look like Frankenstein.”

Sammi knew the importance of scars to their race though, and to him especially. She began to back away from his steady advance, which was exactly what he wanted-for her to act like prey. She let out a squeak as his arm deftly wrapped around her waist and drew her closer. His other hand rose to her face, sliding his claws across her skin and into her hair. She turned her

head away some, but couldn't help but smile coyly. Malo always got his way, but that didn't exactly bother her.

Chapter 26

The guest room they were staying in for the time being wasn't anything like home. The room was barren, with only the necessities, and no quartz bathtub she'd grown used to. The bed as well was lacking, just a simple pallet with a few dull furs. It was big enough to accommodate her and Malo, but she wasn't sure if it would hold up structurally to whatever he had in mind. Most of the time, Malo was a supercharged beast ready to partake in acts of carnal lust in a matter of seconds.

She didn't always have time to fully undress before he was on her, but this time it seemed he was trying his hand at a little foreplay. His arms loosely went around her back, rubbing sensuality as his teeth gently closed on her neck. As his hot breath rolled off her skin, his strong arms tightened around her body. His teeth then lightly nibbled up to her ear. Sammi was disarmed at first, and it took her a second to lift her hands and run them up his arms.

Her palms swept over his broad shoulders, then down his muscular back. His skin was warming and a heady, overly masculine smell was taking over her senses. Sammi stripped off her own clothes, desperate to feel her bare flesh against his. His mouth closed on one of her nipples, making her body surge with sharp desire. His hands palmed her breasts, slid down her body, then reached around to squeeze her ass.

She slipped from his grip to crawl into the bed slowly, making sure he got an eyefull of her, then turned back to give him a lusty look. Malo grabbed his loincloth and with one solid yank he discarded it. He went over to the bed, but even with her in such a vulnerable position he was still taking his time. He even paused to nibble at her toes. Then after that, it was a buffet for him between her legs.

A yautja could only hold out so long though. He crawled over her, her small size making her feel insignificant. Malo pressed his mouth to hers, kissing her with urgency. Sammi reached down to grasp his cock, feeling every vein throbbing in her palm as she guided him to her entrance. As he eased inside her, she tipped her hips up, encouraging him.

His large size was becoming addictive. Sammi wrapped her arms around his hips, making she he wasn't going anywhere. His stallion size was an overwhelming sensory cocktail of pain and pleasure. She wracked her nails down his back as he thrust in deeper. She couldn't help but arch her back as he picked up the pace, deep throaty goans escaping him. When his hand slipped behind her neck as he humped her vigorously, her breaths were heaving.

One minute she was being pounded into oblivion, and the next he swept her off the bed and had her back pressed against the wall. She stared up at him, just trying to catch her breath. Malo hooked his arms under her thighs and hauled her into the air. He thrust back inside her passage, his hips butting her firmly against the wall, and his cock sliding deep inside her. He rammed inside her with vicious force, his grunts filling her ears, and leaving her body quaking.

That glorious feeling gripped her, taking her somewhere words could hardly describe. His cum filled her, giving her all that he had. Her body shuddered with the pleasure and then Malo let her body slide down the wall until her feet touched the floor. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him down for a long kiss. By the time she let him go, her eyes were welling up with tears.

Sammi quickly tried to wipe her eyes before Malo saw. But as soon she turned away, his hand clamped around her forearm to stop her. She felt ashamed for crying, felt weak. They just had amazing sex; she should not have been tearing up. Malo's chest pulsed with a soft purr to calm her.

His claws brushed a strand of hair out of her eyes, "Yautjas are taught that emotions make you weak, and cloud judgement. However, I've learned that your emotion is what makes you dedicated: to family, to religion, to the pursuit of knowledge, everything." His thumb brushed across her cheek, disrupting a line of tears, "It leaks out at odd times, but it is your emotion that makes you stronger."

She couldn't help it, but that just made her cry harder. He started to purr again, but Sammi jumped up and threw herself into his arms. He carried her back to the bed and sat her in his lap. She rested her head against his bare chest and cried her eyes out. With that finally out of her system, she wiped her eyes, and drew in a deep breath.

Malo shifted her so that he could rest his forehead against hers, "I'm going to go get Pruu. Meet me in the medical room."

As he lifted her off of him, she asked, "What for?"

Malo gave her a look that said he wasn't about to tell her what for. Instead, he tied on a new loincloth, then he quickly left the room. Sammi dried her eyes better, dressed, then headed to the medical room. She stood in the middle with her arms crossed, suddenly feeling sort of insecure to be alone. Malo returned quickly with Pruu half-asleep in his arms. Then, he lifted up a shiny decorative dagger and her heartbeat began to soar.

"Get up on the table."

She did as he said, then Malo gently handed over Pruu, and went to a drawer in the wall. He came back with a tiny tin container, and when he opened the lid there was a dark black liquid inside. He untied the strings holding her top up so that he had access to her chest. Sammi knew what he planned to do, but she couldn't believe that it was actually going to happen to her. He dipped the very edge of the dagger into the liquid then brought the blade to her skin.

She winced as the acid ate away at her skin, but the pain was worth it for a smooth and flowing mark. Malo switched out the black liquid for a different jar. He dipped his claws in and wiped an opaque gel over the wound. The pain instantly dissipated as the gel soaked into her skin. When Malo was finished, she lifted her fingers up to feel the brand on her sternum.

"You would mark me as your permanent mate?" Being branded like that was a higher honour than marriage; it indicated the equivalent of true love.

"You are mine as long as you live." He brushed his knuckles across Pruu's cheek without waking her, then leaned his face close to Sammi's ear to whisper, "And that will be much

longer than you think, seeing as our species blood has an odd way of extending human life when ingested.”

The war over the alien planet, which was clan territory, was still under way-but as soon as the air space was safe they could leave. The mission Malo had set out to do had been completed before she rescued him. The clan leaders son had been in battle, so Malo helped take out an important figure from the other clan. He would not be returning to battle, but instead would be going back to the home planet with Sammi and their daughter. Malo had a new challenge ahead of him now: getting his mate pregnant with as many sons as she would bear, and then raising them as warriors and hunters.

~La fine~ (Italian for “the end”)